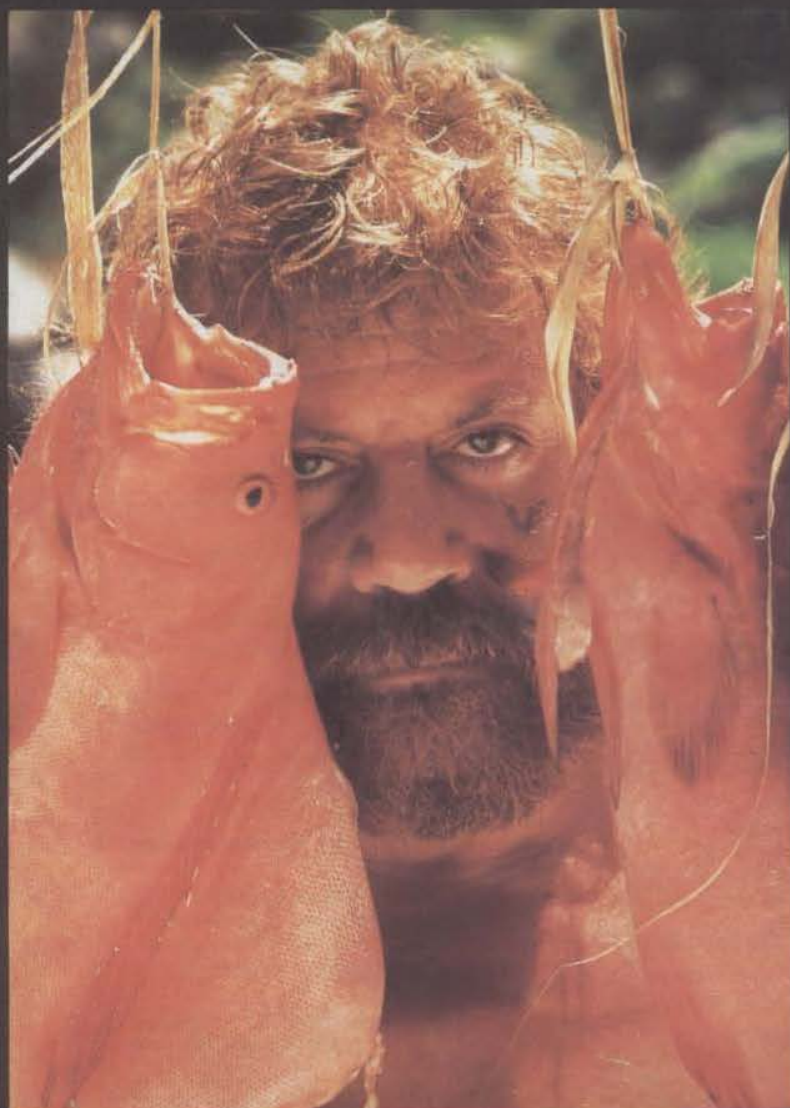


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SIGHT & SOUND

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On the cover: Nicolas Roeg's 'Castaway', with Oliver Reed and Amanda Donohoe.
 Photo: David James.

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Russell's Romantics

Cold pheasant and nameless slime...

'Can you move the baboons a bit to the right?' The cry comes from Ken Russell, at work in the grounds of a country house in Hertfordshire on his first British-made film for ten years. Where his last native picture, *Valentino*, was actually set in the American 1920s, the new one, *Gothic*, takes place in early nineteenth century Switzerland. The subject matter, summed up by one of the crew as 'Byron and Shelley on a dope trip,' is more precisely a macabre fantasia on the theme of the visit made to Byron's villa in 1816 by Shelley and Mary Godwin, during which the latter conceived the idea for *Frankenstein*. The appurtenances included a menagerie: hence the baboons, charming creatures, pacified during the long wait to go on-camera with Cadbury's chocolate rolls.

Produced by Virgin Vision on a budget around £2 million, *Gothic* was filmed this summer wholly on location. After a week in the Lake District, hampered by histrionic weather, the remainder of the shoot was in Hertfordshire, mostly in and around the Palladian mansion Wrotham Park. It is here, in a corner of the rolling lawns, that Russell, rubicund countenance offset by a shock of white hair (and incommunicado to visiting journalists), is at work on part of the movie's concluding sequence.

This is of the principals taking breakfast *sur l'herbe* in a subdued, morning-after mood: while a manservant carves the cold pheasant, Mary (Natasha Richardson) moves somnambulistically in the direction of Shelley (Julian Sands), Byron (Gabriel Byrne), the latter's rejected lover Dr Polidori (Timothy Spall), and Mary's stepsister (Myriam Cyr). Behind them, out of camera range, a troop of extras are being put through their paces in rehearsal for the flash-forward coda wherein a party of tourists are seen rubber-necking around the literary shrine; members of this group had shown admirable restraint when told that they had not, unfortunately, been included in the catering provisions.

Gothic, a kind of ghost story, is the first produced screenplay by Stephen Volk, who on the strength of it has abandoned an advertising career for full-time writing. The script found its way to Al Clark, Virgin's head of production. He was attracted by its 'rollercoaster' quality. 'It was worlds removed from the scripts that one predominantly gets sent in this country, with their



Gothic: Natasha Richardson and baboons. Photo: Clive Coote.

literary ambience and dependence on a sort of linguistic authenticity. I felt it offered a perfect springboard to a director; the question was whom to approach. Then I saw *Crimes of Passion*...

Ken Russell, he says, responded keenly to the script, and they immediately agreed it was the basis for a horror film, not a biopic. (One might argue, of course, that the two genres have been conflated in some of Russell's previous work.) The screenplay emerged not greatly altered from a further draft by Volk and Russell; the latter converted this into a shooting script en route for the Cumbrian location, extra time provided by British Rail which marooned him in a siding.

The production designer is Christopher Hobbs, who previously worked on *Caravaggio*. 'That took seven years,' he recalls, 'and ideally every movie I do would take seven years. This one was, of course, more of a hurry. There was a bit less time than I would have liked, so we never got round to storyboards.' 'Less is best' is his motto for period movies, and he is anxious to avoid 'the BBC approach'. As for visual effects, he casually observes that 'we've had an awful lot of dead babies lying around' and reveals that one of the props was 'a seven-foot penis with skulls and leeches attached.' He insists, however, that Russell is 'not terribly interested in special effects. Above all, he's an actors' director.'

The players concur. Julian Sands, only half in jest, alludes to

Russell as 'a maestro' and says he is 'happy to be engulfed by him'. But, he adds, 'Ken is terribly disciplined and unindulgent, and very conscious of the economics of the operation.' Natasha Richardson, with make-up scar on her cheek and dark circles around her eyes worthy of *Caligari*, describes the director as an extraordinary talent, but concedes that the picture has been grueling, though 'I'd probably look a lot worse if I'd really been through all this.' The breakfast scene being shot, one of those washed out by the Cumbrian weather, is 'pretty untypical—it's a treat being out in the sun and wearing clean clothes.' Her worst ordeal came when she was covered from head to foot in spinach (a practical substitute for nameless slime) and obliged to roll about on the muddy floor of a supposed crypt (actually an out-house, and the film's only constructed set). 'Everyone has got on together very well,' she concludes, 'but considering the pressures of time and the nature of the subject, it's probably only natural that there has been... well, a certain tension.'

Gothic was completed within budget, as representatives of Virgin—whose first wholly financed movie since *Nineteen Eighty-four* this is—are keen to point out. It opens in the US in January in advance of its British release (an encouraging sign of international confidence), but will premiere on home ground, as the closing night attraction of the London Film Festival.

TIM PULLEINE

An Antibes affair

Dirk Bogarde adapts Graham Greene

Graham Greene's work has been so regularly plundered for both large and small screen adaptations that only one serious novel, *A Burnt Out Case*, now remains unfilmed. Major inroads have also been made into Greene's various anthologies of short stories, from *Fallen Idol* to *A Shocking Accident* via Thames Television's distinguished 'Shades of Greene' series from the mid-70s. Television, significantly, was responsible for screen versions of two of the most recent novels, *Dr Fischer of Geneva* and *Monsignor Quixote*. And it is television again—in this case, Yorkshire tv—that has latched on to what many, over the years, have regarded as the most filmable of all Greene's tales: *May We Borrow Your Husband?*, the deliciously dark title story in a volume subtitled 'Comedies of the Sexual Life', first published twenty years ago.

The 'property', as they say, had been floating around since film rights were acquired by, of all people, the late, great Russian-American composer Dimitri Tiomkin, who dabbled from time to time in production (*Tchaikovsky*, etc). When Tiomkin died, the rights passed to his widow Olivia. There seemed to be no further movement on the matter until, one day, the trustee of the

Tiomkin estate passed a script of *May We Borrow Your Husband?* to one of his clients, a prolific commercials director called Bob Mahoney.

Mahoney, a large, amiable individual of the Parker Scott/Hudson generation, has long nurtured ambitions to break from 30-second epics into more substantial work. A few years ago, he directed an elegant short feature, *The Last of Linda Cleer*, which he described as an 'audition piece'. Last year, for Yorkshire and with producer Keith Richardson, he made the tough docu-drama *Operation Julie*.

'When you're a commercials director,' Mahoney said, 'you spend a lot of time in transit and I never really had time to read books—I tended to read short stories. I knew this one from about ten years ago. Subsequently, I had lunch with my accountant [Neville Shulman, the Tiomkin trustee] who told me about the Tiomkin connection and the script. It had been written in the mid-60s, was very dated and totally different from how I imagined it.'

Mahoney's assistant happened to be Dirk Bogarde's nephew Brock, and with his help an approach was made to Bogarde at his home in the South of France. The response was not encouraging—hardly surprising when one realises that Bogarde had been resisting the very same subject from the post-*Servant* Losey days. Another friend, Glenda Jackson, told Mahoney not to take no for an answer. Fuelled by that, he flew to France and, at closer range, phoned Bogarde for an audience.

Bogarde recalls: 'Mahoney came in nervously one morning and brought the new paperback, which had a particularly repellent cover of two old fags, and threw it on the table saying, "I want to make that film but not that book, meaning the cover." The tale, more a novella than a short story, is seen through the eyes of a middle-aged writer who observes, in end-of-season Antibes, the arrival of a callow honeymoon couple and the subsequent disruption caused by a pair of 'sensitive' bachelors.

Mahoney told Bogarde that he saw the scenario more as the 'hopeless' love affair between the writer and the young wife than as the camp *ménage à trois* implied as the bachelors get their hooks into the husband. Bogarde thought that notion hopeful, since the other scripts he had seen down the years had always emphasised the male trio. When he asked who might write it—hazarding the likes of Pinter, or even Greene himself—Mahoney suggested that Bogarde should do it.

Mahoney: 'If I made it, Bogarde asked, when would it be? I said the following March. Where? France. If he tried to write it, when would I want it? Yesterday, I said. Ten days later, I got half the script with a letter saying it was "total rubbish". In fact, it was structurally very good, if a bit wordy. I rang Bogarde for the other half and he told me he had already sent it to his agent. I got it immediately.'

'They all jumped up and down when they read the script, which was flattering,' Bogarde said. 'What I think I have done, as a writer, is to make the observer more interesting and involved in the story than he is in the original. I told them I thought the basic story was still unlickable but we could do something in the playing. Maybe Greene didn't mean it to be a strong love story, which is certainly what I've made it.'

'Did I have trepidation tackling a great writer's work? I never really considered it. My thought was that I'd try to keep the shape and honesty of it and, at the same time, give some background to these unlikely people. Would I have taken the role if I'd been given this script? Now that I know the director, I definitely would. He's young, brave and very sensitive, which belies his looks—because he looks like a great bruiser.'

Mahoney would dearly have loved to have shot the film in 35mm. After speaking to Yorkshire and Keith Richardson (who is also deputy controller of drama), he also approached producer Michael White about

structuring it as a 'Film 4' piece. Scheduling precluded this, however, and ytv went ahead on its own and, fortunately for Mahoney, without the inherent risks of even a US co-production. 'One danger of an American involvement is that they pre-buy, which means they control the script. If you look at this as a synopsis: two gay guys pull the husband; the writer loses out with the girl—there is nowhere to go with that in America.'

For Mahoney, the idea of Greene and Bogarde is irresistible. He is determined, however, that the big-screen break will soon materialise. His dream is to do 'Abelard and Heloise' as 'Last Tango in a Monastery'.

QUENTIN FALK

L.A. graft

Robert Towne and the stalled 'Chinatown' sequel

Writer-director Robert Towne has not been idle since Paramount suspended production in April 1985 on *Two Jakes*, his long-awaited sequel to *Chinatown*. As a producer, he has recently been overseeing James Toback's *The Pickup Artist* for Fox and Curtis Hanson's *The Bedroom Window* for Dino De Laurentiis. Both pictures are scheduled for release early next year.

Towne has produced before, although the role was essentially forced on him when he was directing *Personal Best*. But with the two new films, Towne says, his producer credit is more titular

than real. 'I'm more or less just assisting with the script, casting, and so on. In *The Bedroom Window* I even played a small role.' Does he enjoy the job of producer? 'Have you read Kipling's "The Butterfly That Stamped"? Towne asks. 'A king, bored with his thousand carping wives, retires to his garden to seek solace. There he happens to observe a squabble between a browbeaten butterfly and his mate. The king pulls the butterfly aside and tells him to warn his wife that, if she doesn't stop nagging, the king will give him the power to stamp his foot and make everything disappear. Well, the female butterfly refuses and the king carries out his threat. The king meanwhile has been joined by his wives. The moral lesson is brought home and they are properly chastened. Producing is like that: one stamps a lot on someone else's behalf.'

Towne is so far pleased with both productions. *The Pickup Artist* is about a New York pick-up man, played by Rob Downey, 'a fellow who, in the words of Saki, is "successful in romance at short notice"'. *The Bedroom Window*, which stars Elizabeth McGovern, Steven Guttenberg and Isabelle Huppert, is a romantic murder-mystery in a Hitchcockian vein. It is, according to Towne, impressively scripted by first-time director Curtis Hanson.

As for *Two Jakes*, Towne remains hopeful of eventually getting it made, but he is not holding his breath. When Paramount halted production, the \$25m picture was already \$1.5m in debt, lawsuits were being threatened and the principals—writer-director Towne, star Jack Nicholson and Nicholson's fellow producer Robert Evans—were, it is reported, less friendly than they had once been. The alleged sticking point had to do with Towne's original choice of actor to play the second Jake: Robert Evans.

Meanwhile Towne continues to refine his script. *Two Jakes* picks up eleven years after the end of *Chinatown*, in 1948 when Los Angeles is in the middle of the expansion boom which resulted in the growth of the freeway system and the absorption into today's vast urban sprawl of the individual cities of the L.A. basin. Jake Gittes' nemesis, Jake Bertram, is one of the developers who schemes to bring this about.

Towne is also working on another original screenplay, *Tequila Sunrise*, about a cop and a drug-dealer and the girl who gets involved with them. 'It is about the difference between love and friendship.' Another project is an adaptation of the late John Fante's novel *The Brotherhood of the Grape*.

Further down the road is the



Bob Mahoney, Dirk Bogarde. Photo: Ken Loveday.

third and final instalment in the odyssey of Jake Gittes. 'It's set in 1959 when no-fault divorce becomes law in California and Jake loses 90 per cent of his business.' For a third generation Angeleno like Towne, who has spent all his life in Los Angeles and is one of its acutest observers, this last instalment would seem to provide a sterling opportunity for a definitive summing up. To get part two rolling, however, requires someone 'to cut the Gordian knot'. Perhaps the only fellow in L.A. who might be capable of untangling such a convoluted skein is Jake Gittes himself.

RICHARD TRAINOR

Cinémathèque

The fiftieth anniversary

This year, the Cinémathèque Française is celebrating its fiftieth birthday. It is probably the most famous film archive in the world, not least because of the extraordinary personality of its founder, Henri Langlois. But Langlois died nine years ago, and the Cinémathèque has changed a great deal since then.

One development is a vastly expanded restoration programme, which has been stepped up even more for this anniversary year. On a recent visit to Paris, to look at films for a big National Film Theatre season of French silents scheduled for January 1987, Kevin Brownlow, John Gillett and I were able to see some of the results. There was, for instance, the restored *Casanova* (1927), directed by Alexandre Volkoff, in beautiful hand-tinted colour, with crowd

scenes on a scale to rival *Ben Hur* and featuring an amazingly stylised central performance from the great Mosjoukine. Georges Delerue has composed a special score for the film, which has already been performed to acclaim in both Paris and Los Angeles.

There was an Epstein film of 1925, *Les Aventures de Robert Macaire*, which Kevin Brownlow pronounced to be one of the most beautifully photographed features he had ever seen. And a Feuillade film of 1923, *Le Gamin de Paris*, is an absolutely charming, tautly told comedy drama, featuring Feuillade's former child actor Bout de Zan in what might almost be called an Antoine Doinel role. This really gave the lie to the legend that Feuillade produced nothing of interest after the serials *Les Vampires* and *Judex*.

In general, the avant-garde French film-makers of the 1920s now seem lesser talents than the mainstream Raymond Bernard and Henri Roussel. The Cinémathèque has unearthed a copy of Bernard's *Tarakanova* (1929), a powerful drama, hitherto thought to have been lost, about a gypsy girl who is persuaded to impersonate a princess. Bernard's *Les Miracles des Loups* (1924) and *Le Joueur d'Echecs* (1926) remain little known great films from the French 20s.

The Cinémathèque is doing restoration work on the films of Vigo and Bresson as well as various primitive films. All this is made possible thanks to the budget increases which it has enjoyed in recent years and which it owes to Jack Lang, Minister of Culture until the change of Government earlier

this year. At first, it seems, this extra finance threw the organisation into some confusion. A report of the Cour des Comptes last year revealed tales of money wasted and administrative muddle which led to staff wages being paid twice or not at all. Now, however, all that has changed, and the team of Costa-Gavras (president) and career administrator Bernard Latarjet (director) are sweeping a new broom of efficiency through the 50-year-old organisation.

In the years of Langlois, there was of course no catalogue: Langlois was the only person who knew exactly what films were held in the Cinémathèque. Latarjet now considers that the most urgent task is to produce an inventory of what is actually in the collection—work which should be completed within five years and which is going hand in hand with the restoration programme. At present, some three films a week are being transferred to safety stock, with additional work like the insertion of titles or collation from several different prints being done in some cases.

Latarjet is keen to emphasise the openness of his administration. A new Cinémathèque magazine reports on what is happening within the organisation, down to the details of an embarrassing recent fire in which a handful of not very important films were destroyed in the vaults. Undoubtedly, the secretiveness of the past is over. And as one of the world's greatest archives reveals its treasures, more 'lost' films of the quality of *Tarakanova* are likely to come to light.

STEPHEN BOTTOMORE

Polish perspectives

No grounds for optimism

The National Film Theatre's recent screening of three new Polish films (*Polish Perspectives*, 6 July) might have passed largely unremarked, but for the presence of a vociferous picket from the Polish Solidarity Campaign.

Their attention was drawn towards *Dignity* (Roman Wionczek, 1984), a film described in the Polish Cultural Institute's production notes as an analysis of 'the other side of the Solidarity coin'. In its picture of a family still loyal to the pre-Solidarity unions in the tense atmosphere of November 1981, *Dignity* was always bound to alienate London's many Polish exiles, with their strong commitment to the Solidarity movement. In a leaflet which littered the South Bank, the Polish Solidarity Campaign denounced such an insult to the independent trade union movement, particularly at a time when many activists are still imprisoned under the government's anti-union legislation. The NFT was accused of acquiescing in a major propaganda coup on the part of the Jaruzelski regime, which would receive wide publicity in the official Polish media.

Emigré communities have their own dynamics and obsessions. For the neutral observer, however, it is difficult to see exactly what propaganda advantage accrued to the Polish authorities; some eighty people attended the screening, of whom the majority were bitterly hostile to the film's crude propaganda. Wionczek, who made a vague attempt to justify his work to the audience, cannot have enjoyed his NFT appearance. Only one observer praised the film, a single (non-Polish) voice in a round of heavy criticism. Surprisingly, no one attacked *Dignity* at its weakest point. Only one astute critic highlighted its true value: this officially favoured film was a significant box-office disaster in Poland.

More impressive—and much better received—was *No End* (Krzysztof Kieslowski, 1984), which fully deserved the reputation that had preceded it from Cannes, Rotterdam and Berlin. It was, for a Polish film, highly direct and accessible, even to non-Poles. *No End* interweaves the personal tragedy of a widow (Grazyna Szapolowska) failing to come to terms with the death of her lawyer husband (Jerzy Radziwilowicz—Wajda's Man of Iron), with the more public tragedy of a young worker indicted under the martial law regulations for

Jean Epstein's *Les Aventures de Robert Macaire*.



organising a work-place protest. The film derives its considerable dramatic force from the tensions between the private tragedies, and the public conflicts between moral integrity and political expediency. In its dominant mood of deep pessimism, *No End* has affinities with Zanussi's *Year of the Quiet Sun*. But Kieslowski's pessimism is more deep-rooted.

This was evident in the subsequent discussion. When it was suggested that the sentence imposed on the union activist was lenient enough to imply that the judiciary, at least, was capable of acting honourably, Kieslowski replied that such occasional acts of humanitarianism were too few to inspire much hope for Poland's future. 'Mr Kieslowski sees no grounds for optimism,' commented the interpreter, simply.

The émigré reaction to *No End* was warm and positive, in contrast to the reported attitudes of the dissident underground, which echoed the official criticism of Kieslowski's pessimism. It seemed as though the exiled Poles in the audience shared the director's mood, suggesting that images of Poland as Europe's permanent tragedy still dominate Polish attitudes. 'Are we masochists?' asked one Pole of Kieslowski. No, he replied: this is a sad film, even pessimistic, but not necessarily masochistic. There was a lingering pause before he answered. The interpreter, wisely, decided not to translate this 'dialogue between Poles'.

Interestingly enough, neither Wionczek nor Kieslowski was aware of any real problem over censorship. To the habitually suspicious émigré mind, Wionczek's freedom from interference was unremarkable; he was, after all, a mere mouthpiece for the regime. But Kieslowski's relative freedom, potentially more interesting, passed largely unremarked. Perhaps it had something to do with his interest in the personal responses to the Polish crisis, he suggested. By avoiding the wider issues—at least directly—he made it easier for the authorities to pass the film for screening. Perhaps: but it is always unwise to impute rationality to a totalitarian bureaucratic structure. The Polish people have come to accept without comment anything of value which escapes the dead hand of the censors.

The third film, *A Looming Shadow* (Kazimierz Karabasz, 1984), was a low-key work shot in black and white by a former documentary maker. It clearly revealed its director's documentarist inclinations. As Miss Jean Brodie would have remarked: for those who like that sort of thing, that is the sort of thing they like.

EDWARD ROGERSON



Grazyna Szapolowska in *No End*.

D-Day

A thousand documentaries in a day

In France, this year, D-Day was Documentary Day. Wryly recalling the Allied landings of 6 June 1944, 'La Bande à Lumière', a recently formed association of documentary film-makers, producers and distributors united to promote what they fear is a dying art, organised the first National Documentary Day under the title 'Le Documentaire Débarque' ('The Documentary Lands').

The event was truly national: cinemas and 'vidéothèques' throughout the country, in cities and villages alike, screened a total of approximately 1,000 films. The programming was locally determined and proved to be somewhat chauvinistic. But the French did not have a total monopoly; in Paris, cultural centres presented programmes reflecting their diverse missions, the Centre Georges Pompidou screened recent prize-winning films from the Cinéma du Réel Festival, and Joris Ivens, president of La Bande à Lumière, was honoured by a retrospective. Meanwhile, out on the Brittany peninsula, at Douarnenez, films by Grierson and Flaherty were among those on show.

But French films predominated. The capital's new Vidéothèque (to be officially opened in late 1987) presented films of specifically Parisian interest and the Cinémathèque Française screened some of the finest early French documentaries. France has never produced such a coherent documentary 'movement' as that formed by the British EMB and GPO film-makers, but in the late 1920s, the formal research of Fernand Léger, Henri Chomette and Man Ray that characterised

the avant-garde's preoccupation with a 'cinéma pur', gave way to the more impressionistic documentary film-making of Dimitri Kirsanoff (*Ménilmontant*, 1926), Georges Lacombe (*La Zone*, 1928), Clair (*La Tour*, 1928), Carné (*Nogent, Eldorado du Dimanche*, 1929), Vigo (*A Propos de Nice*, 1930, and *Taris*, 1931) and Jean Lods (*La Vie d'un Fleuve*, 1931). Nowadays, these films are often only considered as privileged instances in the aesthetic development of French cinema, or as jewels to be fitted into their auteurs' crowns. But screening them at the Cinémathèque Française in the context of the Documentary Day underlined their status as rich examples of the genre in their own right, needing no celebrated auteur tag to justify attention.

Although the 'film militant' was conspicuously under-represented in the day's programming, some especially interesting work was shown in a group of films at the Vidéothèque de Paris under the title 'Paris qui Bouge' ('Paris on the Move'). Robert Ménégoz's *La Commune de Paris* (1951), distributed clandestinely in France for five years before receiving a non-commercial visa, is a stirring statement on the permanence of the lessons of the 1871 Commune and was followed by a collective work, *La Libération de Paris* (1945), made by the 'Réseau de Résistance du Cinéma'. Images of the fighting in the streets of Paris in August 1944, supported by a rousing patriotic commentary, are both intensely moving and vivify recent French history by their vital 'reportage' form. Jean Herman's *Actua-Tilt* (1961) stated slyly and gloomily that modern culture's mechanical games of destruction are rooted in the terrifying realities of daily life, while Chris Marker's *2084* (1984) made grim, and also somewhat ostentatious, predictions

about a future technocratic society.

Further groupings of films at the Vidéothèque included a nostalgic 'Paris-Toujours'. Finally, Jean Grémillon's *La Maison aux Images* (1955), one of five films on the theme of painting, was a meticulously constructed homage to the engravers of Montmartre that confirmed Grémillon's unfortunate status as one of the most neglected of French film-makers.

One can criticise such a Documentary Day for exhaustingly varied programming that tends to numb both senses and intellect. Yet, as desired, the policy of saturation did provide ample examples of imaginative and creative work, breaking the stereotype of dull didacticism which the organisers fear haunts the documentary. Moreover, screening some of the most acclaimed instances in the history of documentary alongside—in more customary festival fashion—lesser known contemporary work, was a sound programming decision; if the documentary art is to survive and flourish, its rich tradition must be seen and not just heard of.

Interestingly, provincial audiences proved easier to mobilise than their Parisian counterparts, but the organisers declared themselves satisfied with the day and hope that the event will become annual. In the meantime, they are carrying out a market survey into the demand and potential outlets for documentary, and an international conference on its evolution and future is to be held in March 1987. Greatly admiring the work of Channel 4, they hope that British documentary film-makers will be active participants.

RICHARD ALWYN

Trauner

Images of Paris

To celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the Cinémathèque Française, what more appropriate than an exhibition of the *maquettes* of the set designer who virtually created Paris on film? Now a genial octogenarian, Alexandre Trauner came to Paris from Budapest in 1929. He came to study painting but quickly drifted into the cinema. He worked as Lazare Meerson's assistant on *Le Million*, *Le Quatorze Juillet* and *La Kermesse Héroïque*, and in 1932 met Jacques Prévert with whom he became firm friends. Thus the celebrated Carné/Prévert collaboration actually has a third term, and this is Trauner.

The canalside in *Hôtel du Nord*, inspired by the Canal St Martin, but somehow poeticised and

distanced both by the artist's eye and then by the lens; the deserted streets of *Le Jour se Lève*, with the welcoming and warmly lit café La Ruche contrasting with the stark verticals of the adjoining building and the metal structure of the street lights; above all, no doubt, the Boulevard du Crime in *Les Enfants du Paradis*, so much more bustling and colourful than ever the reality could have been that many people forget the film was actually made in black and white; all these sets were designed by Trauner.

His career did not end there. He went to the United States in the late 1950s and worked with many of the most interesting Hollywood directors (Hawks, Ritt, Huston) and, most successfully, Billy Wilder, for whom he designed *The Apartment*, *Irma la Douce* and *Kiss Me, Stupid*. Anyone who had thought that the Paris sets derived from the happy encounter between an émigré sensibility and a particularly well-preserved urban environment will have been astonished to see the alacrity with which Trauner absorbed and reproduced for the benefit of the natives the brash new environment of postwar America, in which trends were set more by the shape of consumer goods than by artistic productions.

Even more astonishing, perhaps, is Trauner's work since he returned to France in 1975. Four films for Joseph Losey including *Don Giovanni*; Tavernier's *Coup de Torchon*; and, most remarkably, Luc Besson's *Subway*, which not only shows Trauner to be obsessed with the Métro, as all self-respecting foreigners in Paris ought to be, but also displays a

remarkable empathy with contemporary youth culture.

The Trauner exhibition is hung in the incongruous setting of the Ecole des Beaux Arts, which contrives to throw the *maquettes* into exquisite relief. As one enters the exhibition hall the roof rises to a gloomy cupola around whose walls are hung the prize works of long-forgotten academic painters. Rhetorical in gesture, grandiose in theme and execution, these classical subjects offer a bizarre backdrop to the white screens below on which are hung Trauner's paintings, all manageable in size, all with finely drawn detail and bright splashes of colour. Even a monumental structure such as the castle walls in the *maquette* of *Les Visiteurs du Soir* is transformed by Trauner's brush into something from a fairy tale, with that slight flatness which reminds the viewer that it isn't even attempting to look real. Thus the paintings take on an existence almost independent of the films they designed, an independence paradoxically reinforced by the stills which are invariably exhibited beside them. It is fascinating to see the transformation that takes place and to speculate on Trauner's extraordinary capacity, which Billy Wilder called his 'third eye', to see what a set would look like through the camera lens.

Finally, the Trauner exhibition is interesting because it reminds us what a wealth of material relating to the cinema remains to be discovered. At present London is even worse provided than Paris with suitable exhibition space, and much riveting material in the corridor leading to the NFT bar is passed over by those unwilling to dally except

in front of alcohol.

No doubt all this will change with the opening of the MOMI. What a marvellous opportunity to reconstitute this exhibition, the more so perhaps as in *Drôle de Drame* and *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes* Trauner has reconstituted in his inimitable manner a portion of our own past.

JILL FORBES

Mr Carlosawa

Carlos Saura at the National Film Theatre

Spain's most celebrated living director came to London this June. With Sheila Whitaker, the NFT Deputy Controller, I went to meet him at Heathrow. We stood at the barrier looking out for 'the introverted face of a nuclear scientist... a hermetic mouth... a lanky figure... a mild forehead suggesting "Without memory we are nothing".' Drawn up in 1975, novelist Juan Marsé's verbal identikit made Carlos Saura seem unpictureable but unmissable.

In the event, when he appeared it was the famous shoulder bag which gave Saura away. Reputedly containing pens, felt-tips, pads, cassettes and other knick-knacks of the trade, it never left his side during the visit. 'More than in his head,' a Spanish critic once joked, 'Carlos Saura carries his films about in his bag.'

During his stay, conversation turned inevitably to Buñuel. It had been Saura, along with producer Pere Portabella and critic Francisco Aranda, who had met Buñuel at Cannes in 1960 and

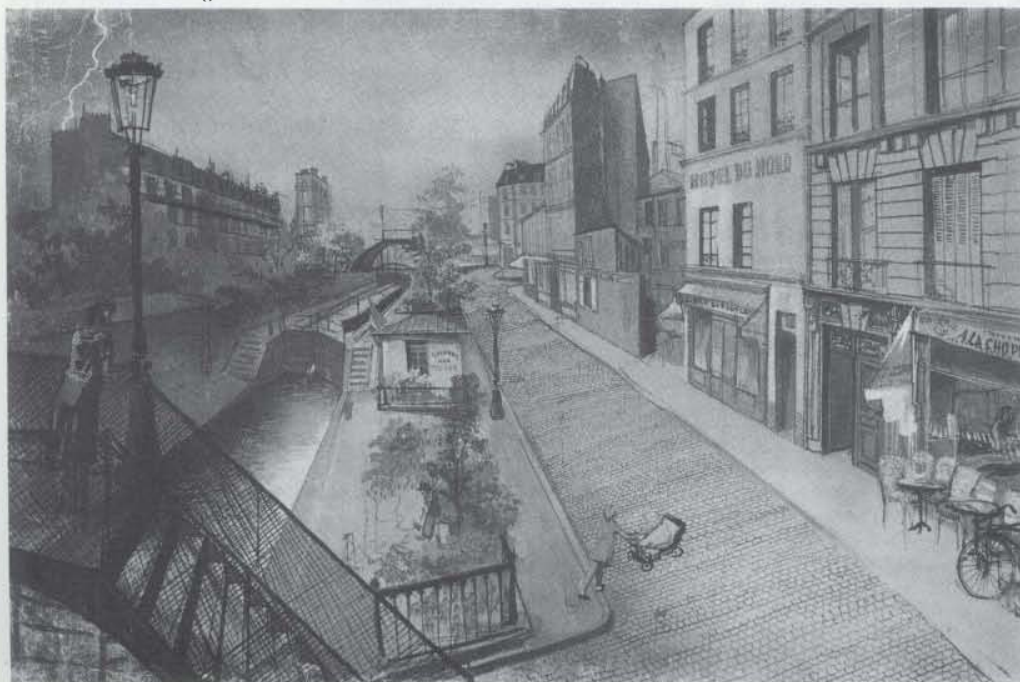
persuaded him to go to Spain to make *Viridiana*. An infrequent film writer, Saura wrote the best article of his life, 'The Return to Spain', in homage to the old master (whom he described, in a memorable turn of phrase, as having the air of 'a freshly dug-up potato'). Buñuel for his part, having met the young lions, was to declare, 'If Spanish youth is like those I have met... then Spain is getting better.' The greatest compliment ever paid him, Saura told us, was when Buñuel said he would have given anything to have directed Saura's *Cousin Angelica* (1973).

Like Don Luis, Don Carlos is from Aragón. Traditionally, the Aragónese are stubborn and strong-willed, and Saura needed such qualities to survive a grueling schedule: two days of interviews; a Guardian lecture (which I chaired with Peter Evans, co-author of *Blue Skies and Silver Linings*); the British premiere at the NFT of *El Amor Brujo* (the final part of Saura's Spanish dance trilogy). It was a self-styled example of Aragónese *terquedad*, obduracy, which made for one of Saura's better anecdotes. He wanted to use a catchy little tune, 'Porque te vas' ('Because You're Leaving'), in *Raise Ravens* (1975). Geraldine Chaplin didn't like it. His sons didn't like it. The neighbours' kids didn't like it. Elias Querejeta didn't like it. But Saura insisted... A few weeks before coming to London, he bumped into José Luis Perales, the song's composer. Perales slapped him on the back and thanked him: because of *Raise Ravens*, 'Porque te vas' had sold four million copies.

In interviews Saura answered questions diffidently and treated interviewers' opinions deferentially. 'Puede ser' ('It could be') was a characteristic reply. For the Guardian lecture he took off his jacket, loosened his tie, and dwelt with playful theatricality on the sometime difficulty of being Carlos Saura. 'Mr Saura, your films deal with barriers to communication,' I would sally. 'Would you see role-play as one of these?' 'That's a very profound question,' Saura would parry. 'I'd get lost answering that one.'

'Would Mr Saura agree to the proposition,' someone from the audience asked, 'that he is not going to tell us what his films mean because he wants them to speak for themselves?' Saura's answer was yes, he expected his work to be its own best explanation. At the same time, the persona which he brought off to a T during the lecture was that of a film-maker who was far more intuitive than was generally thought and who was now being asked to account for his inspiration. He would not call himself a 'political film-maker', nor did

One of Trauner's designs for Carné's *Hôtel du Nord*.





Carlos Saura at the NFT.
Photo: Sten M. Rosenlund.

he think of the characters in *Fast, Fast* (1980) as 'delinquents'. There were 'many reasons' why he made that film; and 'lots and lots' of American directors who had influenced him. Film-making wasn't easy. The other day he had found some notes written a few years back. 'How the hell,' one read, 'am I going to make *Carmen*?'

The new expansiveness in Saura is a sign of the times. Spain has changed and so has he. After *Blindfolded* (1978), Saura said he would make 'something more open, more extrovert, even more amusing.' He made a satirical allegory, *Mama Turns a Hundred* (1979), the robbery thriller *Fast, Fast* and a burlesque on the mother obsession, *Sweet Hours* (1981). A close collaboration with Teo Escamilla, his Sevillian director of photography since *Raise Ravens*, and marriage to his young wife Mercedes, whose family comes from Andalusia, perhaps helped to push Saura's cultural co-ordinates further south. Camera-work becomes warmer and more sensual; sequences are enjoyed for their visual fascination and their emotions. But recent films have been much criticised in the Spanish press.

Whenever Saura walked into the Savoy, a receptionist of some foreign extraction would call for the keys of 'Mr Carlosawa'. The parallel is a good one. Yet while Kurosawa is accused in his country of westernising his Japanese heritage, the home case against Saura is that he plays up native traditions which have really seen their day. It is understandable that Spaniards should not want to be presented abroad as a lot of boiled-down gypsies. But that is to miss Saura's point. *Blood Wedding* (1980), *Carmen* (1983) and now *El Amor Brujo* are acts of cultural recuperation, exploring enduring obsessions of Spanish culture, such as the mixture of fantasy and reality which is as prevalent in 1986 as in the time of Cervantes.

JOHN HOPEWELL

Edinburgh

Discovery, rediscovery and debate

Edinburgh Film Festival celebrated its fortieth birthday with a rich and overcrowded programme: a full international spread of movies, dozens of filmmakers in attendance and a plethora of tributes, mini-events and conferences. Having had some small hand in the programming (I put festival director Jim Hickey on to Bernard Vorhaus and martial arts star turned director Jackie Chan, and recommended a scattering of other movies), I'm obviously in no position to judge objectively, but it seemed to me that the right balances were struck. There was an optimum mixture of discovery, rediscovery and debate, and no one had any excuse to while away hours in the bar.

The festival has now definitively outgrown the capacity of the British film press to deal with it; the dearth of cine-literate film magazines (and the parsimonious allocations of space in the dailies) means that all too much of the programme passes unrecognised or undiscussed. What Edinburgh now urgently needs is increased funding to consolidate its position in the international arena. The presence of more critics from countries where film is taken as seriously as theatre would definitely help.

The belated recognition for the work of Bernard Vorhaus was helped along by the presence of the man himself, an 81-year-old of sound mind and quick, self-deprecatory wit, lured from retirement in St John's Wood to introduce films he made 50-odd years ago. Vorhaus (born in New York in 1904) worked as a writer in the Hollywood of the late 1920s, but got his first real shot at directing in the chaotic and undercapitalised British film industry of the early 1930s, where he soon rivalled Michael Powell as a director of ambitious 'quota quickies'.

As well as giving the young editor David Lean his first break and discovering actors like Ida Lupino and Margaret Rutherford, Vorhaus distinguished himself by his expert construction of fast-paced narratives, often enhanced by vivid location shooting. Movies like *The Last Journey* (1935) and *Dusty Ermine* (1936) give the lie to much of the received wisdom about British cinema of the period: they are fresh and innovative, they have a joyous sense of humour and keen eyes and ears for the bizarre, and they don't patronise their working-class characters. Vorhaus' subsequent American career (curtailed by the McCarthy

blacklist) was less exciting, although it included films as accomplished as *The Spiritualist* (1948) and *So Young, So Bad* (1950). It's a minor scandal of film history that so distinctive a talent has remained forgotten for so long.

The festival hosted a three-day conference on what the Ethiopian-American academic Teshome Gabriel has termed 'Third Cinema'—a progressive, non-aligned and self-shaping 'Third World' cinema—which quickly turned into a non-meeting of minds: macho militant posturing on one side and quavering, apologetic voices of rationality on the other. It made no great difference, but the event's sense of geography seemed curiously awry: nothing east of India got a look in. Ironically, the festival was simultaneously screening Filipino movies by the late directors Manuel Conde and Gerardo de Leon, which would have been directly relevant to any discussion of 'Third World' resistance and/or capitulation to Hollywood models and would have introduced a useful historical perspective.

Beyond its inevitable ration of new British tv-financed features, the festival offered three non-British world premieres, and it seemed characteristic of Edinburgh that no great drums were beaten for any of them. Yamakawa Naoto's *The New Morning of Billy the Kid*, from Japan, is a brilliantly sustained philosophical comedy that conjures together a motley crew of Eastern and Western archetypes and has them shoot it out in the ultimate saloon gunfight. Almost entirely studio-shot, it uses the resources of the sound-stage with a mastery to compare with the heyday of the 1930s, but to glitteringly modernist ends. Allen Fong's *Just Like Weather*, from Hong Kong, is an understated study of a young couple on the verge of

separating, whose future may or may not lie in emigration to the USA. Always close to documentary, it has its finger on the pulse of Hong Kong's social and political anxieties but never hurries past the minutiae that illuminate everyday behaviour.

Equally wet from the labs came David Byrne's debut feature *True Stories*, a typically oblique vehicle for Byrne's band Talking Heads, framed as an investigation into the eccentricities of life in a small town in Texas. The dry, absurdist humour and formalist games seen in the band's videos resurface here as Byrne collages together cameo portraits, songs and what Beckett would call 'dramaticules'. Ed Lachman's resourceful, ultra-cool cinematography raises him to the Robby Müller class at a stroke.

Finally, two favourites from the general programme of new films. Fredi M. Murer's *Höhenfeuer* (*Alpine Fire*) details the lives of a four-person family who farm in total isolation near the top of a mountain, focusing particularly on the retarded, deaf-mute son. The strangeness of the setting makes the shift into incestuous love story, tragedy and catharsis seem both natural and truthful. It's like *Fists in the Pocket* remade in the terms of *Fire Festival*. And equally resonant images could be found in the show of short films by Raymond Red, a phenomenal young independent from Manila. Still only 21, Red has enough imagination to fire a space shuttle and enough technical skill to produce precisely denoted images (a seedy rented room in the 1950s, a tumbledown shack in the mountains) that have apparently limitless connotations. Far from the western stereotype of 'Third World' values, these films offer fantasy without a trace of escapism. They're also almost preternaturally beautiful.

TONY RAYNS

Yamakawa Naoto in Monument Valley.





Schalcken the Painter.

JOHN HOWKINS

discusses some of the issues likely to be raised at a major conference, 'Film & Television: A European Partnership', taking place at the NFT on 1-2 October.

Delicate

British film-making says that it is in crisis, and it could be telling the truth. There is no shortage of ideas, no shortage of people who like films, no shortage of money to spend at the box office or video shop. But there is a lack, to the point of despair and exhaustion, of good management and workable economics. Apart from Cannon and British Screen (and Channel 4), the prospects are discouraging. Development money is scarce; production starts are very few, profits almost invisible. It is reported that no equity investor in a British film has made a profit for several years. Things are expected to get worse. But British television flourishes, in almost every way, institutionally, artistically, financially: ITV shares are over-subscribed; the programmes are excellent; TV managements may face hard tasks ahead and fierce competition for programmes and audiences, but they are confident of success. Are these issues related? Where lies the solution? In regulation or in the market? In the UK, Europe or on an even wider scale? What is the role of government? What is the role of the producer?

The problem can be illustrated by two films, one a feature, the other a TV film.

In each a highly talented film-maker has given his personal interpretation of an artist and his work, and it is this similarity of approach that allows us to compare the works in both intention and result. The film is *Caravaggio*, by Derek Jarman. The TV film is *Schalcken the Painter*, by Leslie Megahey.

Caravaggio, six years in development, became a *cause célèbre*. Its fame demonstrated, very precisely, the problems of the independent film-maker. It became famous, even notorious, because of Jarman's efforts to raise money and the way in which he developed the script and moved into production. It became famous, in other words, for reasons that mostly are not present in the film, nor visible on the screen; interest focuses on the way the film was financed and made rather than on its content and quality. *Absolute Beginners* suffered in the same way. They are typical sagas of the independent film-maker.

Compare *Schalcken the Painter*. It is incontestably the better film—better written, lit, dressed, directed; it is also more interesting. But the point here is that we expect the BBC to commission and finance such work (at two-thirds the price of *Caravaggio*), whereas we are astonished when an independent film-maker manages to do so. And in some queer way the BBC film doesn't count as film (it has been shown only twice, which is a stupid waste), whereas the independent work is classed as a film, is shown in cinemas here and in the USA and is touted as evidence that British film-making is alive and well. Everyone who

has seen *Caravaggio* but is unaware of the existence of *Schalcken* is testament to the lopsided state of British film-making.

It is partly a question of corporate management. Film companies tend to be small, under-capitalised and unstable. The BBC and ITV companies are large, businesslike and protected by government licences. Film companies live for the film; often literally, when a producer sets up a new company for each production. Television companies are in the business of corporate growth. Yet they share something in common. In both industries there exists a bundle of principles and procedures that might be called the social software of production. This social software is the fuel, the oxygen, that powers the creation of good work. The question is, will the oxygen of creativity be cut for certain kinds of film production and programme production, or will it be secured for the future for an increasing range of work?

The question has little to do with technology and very little to do with the technologies of distribution (cinemas, transmitters, cable). Such technologies are crucial in the operational flows of rights and revenues, but they have little effect on the management of the material (TV, film, video, voice, data) that generates those flows. The invention and control of distribution routes is important, but distribution is always dependent upon the social software of production. The future both of independent film-making and of public broadcasting depends upon the skills, talent and



Caravaggio.

Systems

management of production.

As far as I know, these issues have not yet been addressed by the UK's public constituencies that have a legislative or regulatory responsibility for broadcasting or film (the Peacock committee did not help). A few entrepreneurs and companies are aware of the issues and want to innovate; but they are usually regarded as exceptional and peripheral. Change is always difficult; institutional change the hardest of all. Nor have the issues been tackled by the various organisations that lobby and speak for the film and TV industries. Years ago, there was much talk of 'producer power'. More recently, producers and film-makers were energetic and imaginative in shaping what finally became Channel 4. Those voices, that carried to distant hills, now seem reduced to murmurs, worried about more minor transient matters.

To disentangle this complex skein, it is instructive to look at the stronger and more successful of the two industries and to see how it justifies itself. This year television marks its fiftieth anniversary. It is a time for celebration, and bringing out the family totems.

One of the most popular totems of British broadcasting is the concept of 'ecology'. It is almost a sacred cow. Broadcasters who use the term tend to speak sonorously. They imply that the current system is natural and delicate and should not be disturbed. They are right on one count and they are wrong on two counts. The reasons are revealing about both films and television.

The word is corrupt. In its original meaning, it meant the study of an environment and relationships within it; later it has come to mean the specific relationships of humans to their environment. It was mostly used by biologists and social biologists when they began to apply systems theories to life itself. In one sense, the analogy is still correct. An ecology is understood to be delicate; either in a state of balance, or continuously seeking balance. A single alteration at any point in the system will therefore affect not only all other points but also the system's ability to be coherent and stable. Each alteration, even the smallest, will have this effect.

So far, so good. The description can be applied to the structures and institutions of British broadcasting (and, if broadcasting is 'delicate', how much more so is British film). The strengths and characteristics of British broadcasting derive from the whole rather than any individual part; conversely, each part derives substantial strength from the whole. Sir Charles Curran, Director General of the BBC in the early 1970s, said that, 'It is difficult to consider any single aspect of broadcasting without being drawn into considering a whole series of related aspects of the topic. One problem is inseparable from another.' He called his BBC memoirs, *A Seamless Robe*.

If broadcasters were claiming only that their systems were delicate, there would be no disagreement. Most social systems are delicate. But the broadcasters claim more. By using the word

ecology, they imply that the system is natural and also that it should not be disturbed. These claims cannot be justified, and are obstacles to the positive expansion of the arts and industries of the moving image. They are a particular hindrance to the work of independent film-makers.

There is nothing natural about British broadcasting. It is so successful because it is so artificial; so artful. The current duopoly has been constructed over a number of years by a series of painstaking decisions, many of which were controversial. The loci of policy-making swings continuously to and fro between government and the broadcasting organisations and, occasionally, the public. At all times, however, the objective has been single-minded and enlightened: the production, scheduling and delivery of diversified public services. In order to achieve this target, the policy-makers have constructed a wondrous architecture of regulation and liberation, of duties and freedoms. The establishment of each major institution—the BBC, ITA, ITV and Channel 4—has been more complicated and more precise and more successful in reaching this goal. Channel 4 is the culmination. I mean that while many countries have set up a national corporation on the lines of the BBC, no country has managed to create so successful a duality as the current BBC/ITV duopoly, and no country has even tried to set up such an intricate and clever body as Channel 4.

I believe, however, that the UK's refinement of public service broadcasting

has reached its pinnacle. It has come to an end. It was man-made, and the resources and energies and ambitions of the policy-makers and money-makers and even of some of the programme-makers are now focused on other targets.

These new targets lie outside the existing broadcasting system. That is not necessarily a bad thing, and might even be a good thing. An industry's ability to explore and exploit an ever-increasing variety of opportunities and markets is a measure of its health and vigour. It is the essential problem of film that it remains excluded from these new markets. Most film-making in Britain outside Channel 4 finds itself excluded both from the main UK market (i.e., TV) and from the main world market (i.e., the USA). Television, in contrast, can move quickly—financially and managerially—into new markets in terms both of new countries and of new media.

The growth of video is a good example. Many film companies were unprepared for the speed with which it happened. In the US, video revenues now exceed theatrical revenues. But the money is not going back to the producers. First the US producers and then the European producers effectively lost control of the video rights to the distributors. Why? Because they did not have enough commercial strength or intelligence to wait for better terms. It is not a coincidence that the most profitable business of Thorn EMI's Screen Entertainment was with HBO Video, which Cannon wishes to continue. The TV companies have taken the opposite strategy. The TV archives are full of material, but the companies can afford to wait. To them that hath, so shall it be given.

This example does not imply that the BBC and the ITV companies are reluctant to move into new media. The BBC was the first British organisation to ask for a satellite channel (two, actually); the first to operate a movie channel; and so on. The point is that it and the ITV companies operate from a position of licensed strength. It also does not imply that TV is not changing. Television continually changes its spots. It was originally and for many years an integral part of national public broadcasting. In each of those three elements it has developed, often radically. It is increasingly dominated by private interests. This trend may not be irreversible but at present it is entirely one way. It is increasingly international. And it is increasingly involved not just in broadcasting but in other distribution systems. The national public systems are becoming sub-systems of private global systems. Television and film and video are now enjoined in an international matrix of financial centres, production centres, distribution networks, markets and audiences. The linkages and modes of this matrix are not primarily technical but financial, managerial and structural.

It is easy to be fascinated by the high technology of satellites and cable. They are symbols of a new era—not the Third Age of Broadcasting but possibly the Third Age of Television, since one of the

key trends is the widening gulf between the broadcasting industry which is national and the television industry which is not tied to any physical base. Actually, these technologies are ciphers. It will be years before any satellite-delivered TV service provides an effective on-screen alternative to the existing BBC and IBA services. Much more important are the current developments in liberalisation, especially of terrestrial television, and the creation of Europe-wide conglomerates for production and distribution. It is these extremely rapid developments on the ground in Milan, Paris, London and Brussels (and New York) that will determine the future of all Europe's television services.

Now the UK is a highly regulated, artificial market and it is reasonable to look to see what government is thinking and doing. The government's attitude to film is wobbly. It appears to think little, and do less. Can you imagine a government Committee on Financing the Feature Film? If you can, you must be in Paris or Madrid or Rome or Sydney or Ottawa—not in London.

It must be said that the recent report of the Committee on Financing the BBC is not as much help as it might have been. It is a useful report, in many ways, but it is too partial and restricted. Professor Peacock and his colleagues were too conventional, imprisoned by history and by the Home Office. They are good on terrestrial broadcasting (the past and present) but not so good on other distribution techniques (the present and future). Two brief examples: the report's group of British Telecom's policies is simply incorrect, and its use of the concept of information is ambiguous to say the least. And its comments on direct broadcast satellites have a startling factual error and ignore the crucial financial and structural factors.

The failure is interesting. The Home Office's Broadcasting Department is a small unit that prefers to take a relatively passive line on broadcasting matters. It is the guardian of public service, of course, but in practice the hard work has been done by the BBC and the IBA. Any controversies have tended to involve, or even originate in, not the Home Office but the Prime Minister's Office. The Broadcasting Department has been content to burnish the principles and has in fact developed an extremely refined, logical and hard-headed policy. It is also extremely old-fashioned, introverted and rigid.

These comments are not criticisms of the officials, but of the politicians. A very major cause of the current problem is the fragmentation of government responsibilities for the moving image. The Home Office is responsible for the BBC and the IBA, and the Cable Authority. The Department of Trade and Industry is responsible for film. In between are the Premiere, Sky, Superchannel satellite channels, etc, which are neither broadcasting nor film and are practically free of all official licensing and controls. This situation is confusing, as was clear in the long-running discussion between

the Home Office and the DTI over the ITV levy and its effect on film production. Even worse, it inhibits the generation of sensible policies for the future.

What should those policies rest on? What indeed is the nature of policy in a liberalised, open communications sector (assuming that is the aim)? It is, surely, the production of a quantity, a mass, of excellent material—of *Schalckens*—that can be distributed equitably to the national audience. It means turning up the oxygen of creativity, not turning it off by cutting public support and inhibiting the market. Above all, it means reaffirming production skills as the core talent of the industry. Those skills are both creative and managerial.

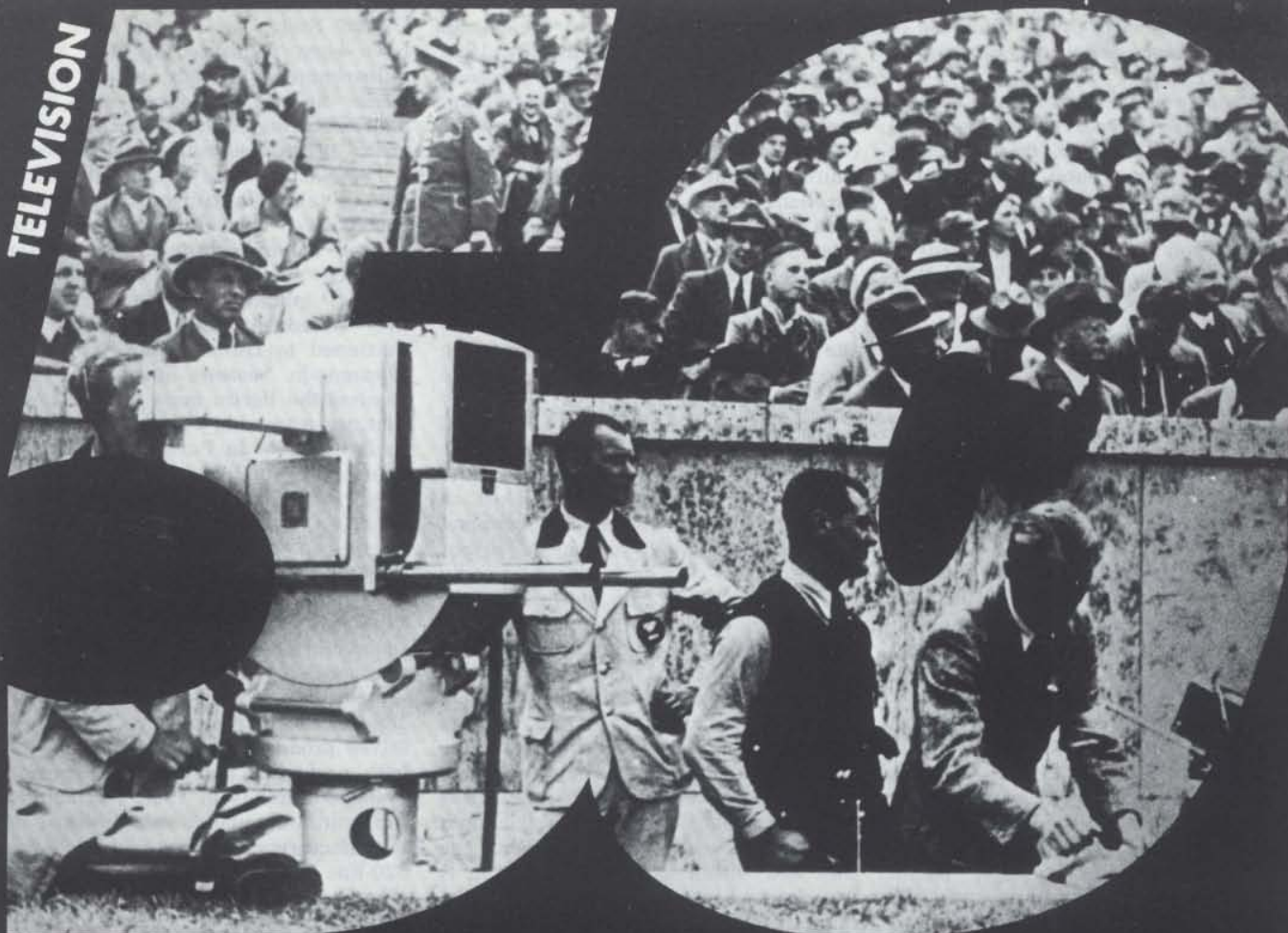
The timing is crucial. The growth of terrestrial television and the expansion of satellite television have led to significant shifts in the various national production industries. New conglomerates, and new distribution patterns, are starting to operate in Italy, France and Germany. The licensing of private television in Spain next year will speed up this process. The British industries are already being affected. Prices are rising, and competition is getting stronger.

The independent film-maker looks at these prospects, and doesn't much like them. He or she feels as if his/her disadvantages cannot but get worse. The fact that Europe is on the brink of a tremendous expansion of production and reception seems cold comfort. Inefficient management, restrictive licensing and competitive disadvantages appear enormous obstacles. The independent film-maker may respond by saying: All I want is to make a film. That strategy, as demonstrated by the *Caravaggio/Schalcken* comparison, is too facile.

Two things can be done. The first is for producers and directors to alert government policy-makers to the need, above all, for a policy on production. In the UK, this policy should be a matter of debate and collaboration between the Cabinet Office, the Home Office and the DTI and possibly the Department of Education and Science. The European Commission, and other European countries, must play their part. Essentially, the policy should recognise the fundamental contribution that creative people make to film and television. The second thing is the first thing seen from the other side. Producers and directors need to mobilise their own resources. Good producers are skilful at the management of talent: the time has now come for film-makers to exercise that skill in their own jobs. In future, the producer needs to make choices on the basis not of financial scarcity but of the content and the quality of the work.

To many, these changes will seem undesirable, largely on the grounds that they appear impractical. The success of TV should point the way. One, TV is closer to British audiences than is film. Two, TV is more pertinent, more contemporary. The exceptions in the film industry, not surprisingly, are film companies owned by TV companies and run by ex-TV people. That should be evidence enough. ■

TELEVISION



Television at the 1936 Olympic Games.

The Anniversary Stakes

William Uricchio & Brian Winston

It seems that we have a deep-seated propensity for celebrating anniversaries and, from the standpoint of received British history, 1986 looks like a very good year in which to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the start of regular television broadcasting—on 2 November 1936. The aim of this article is not to question whether it is appropriate to kill the fatted calf for television broadcasting's fiftieth year. Rather, it is simply to ask whether the November date is a reasonable candidate for fulfilling this apparently quite serious human need.

Were it just up to the British, there would of course be no problem. On 2 November 1936 the BBC started regular transmissions from Alexandra Palace, using two different systems turn and turn about on a nightly basis. One system was the product of the Baird Television Development Company (BTDC), the organisation founded nearly a decade earlier by the pioneer John Logie Baird. The other, a product of an industrial laboratory team combining the forces of EMI and Marconi, was closely based on work done in America for RCA by Vladimir Zworykin.

So why not have 2 November 1936 as the great day? Simply because this period

of comparative testing, for all that it was in public, was self-evidently still experimental—otherwise they would not have been using two systems. And experimental transmission of television pictures on one or other line standard, using one or other technology, had been going on in Britain, as in many other countries, since the late 1920s.

Even from the British standpoint, then, it might make better sense to postpone the jubilee until 6 February 1987—the fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of the London Television Standard of 405 lines. It was on this date in 1937 that the superior Marconi/EMI/RCA system prevailed over BTDC. From then until the close down of service some thirty months later, with the coming of war, Marconi/EMI/RCA reigned alone. It would surely be pedantic wretchedness of the worst kind to call attention to the fact that 'the world's first continuous high definition television service' was thus interrupted, due to circumstances beyond its control, for the next several years. But it is reasonable to question the validity of this 'firstism' in the first place, by inscribing the exactly parallel series of events going on in Germany.

Before doing so, a definition of 'high

definition' television is needed. Today 'high definition' means a picture with at least 1,000 lines, but back in the 30s it meant something less. High definition was then defined by comparison with the first flickering electro-mechanical systems of the sort Baird had been playing with from 1925 on. Initially these systems produced pictures in the 30-line range, and indeed numerous transmissions at this level of image resolution were undertaken in a number of countries. By 1932, for instance, the BBC, using a Baird 30-line system, broadcast half an hour of programming regularly four times a week. This service was discontinued in September 1935, by which time as many as 5,000 receivers were in existence.

These transmissions became known as 'low definition' in the early 30s, when greater line standards were coming on stream. In an article written for the *Journal of the (British) Television Society* in 1937, E. H. Traub reported on his visit to the Berlin Radio Exhibition of that year. In reviewing television developments in Germany, he wrote: '1931 marks the beginning of what may be called the high definition era, exemplified by the 90-line demonstrations

of Fernseh AG and of the 100-line picture of the German Post Office.' This use of the term 'high definition' is entirely typical of the day.

The contradistinction between 30 or so lines and lines in excess of 100 was not to be drawn again between 100-line images and images up to and including the London Television Standard of 405 lines. Nor were increases to 441 lines (in the late 30s) and the 525/625 standards of the period after the Second World War marked by a new conception of high definition.

This is a crucial point in the anniversary stakes, because the Germans began regular transmissions of high definition television (as it was then understood) on 22 March 1935. For three nights a week the same 90 minutes of programming was transmitted, using an advanced mechanically scanned 180-line system. The Nazis called this 'the first broadcast system in the world with regular television programming.' By 1936 different programming was put out each night, except Sunday (rather as BBC radio at this same period played no dance music on the Lord's Day). A complex pattern of minute segments—a single song, for instance—alternated with a couple of more substantial programmes, a 30-minute documentary or the like.

It is estimated that over 150,000 people saw portions of the Berlin Olympic Games in the summer of 1936 in forty or more public television viewing halls. Television cameramen covering the games were given more access to events than were Leni Riefenstahl's personnel.

The Germans did not sell many receivers. By 1939 there were only an estimated 200 private sets in use, outside the television halls. The tenor of Nazi life, never mind the economic situation of the late 30s, saw television as functioning in a public rather than a private way. In inaugurating the service in 1935, Reichssenderleiter (Reich Broadcast Director) Eugene Hadamovsky saw television in these terms: 'After 30 January 1933, radio preached the Führer's words to all ears. Now, in this hour, broadcasting is called upon to fulfil its biggest and most sacred mission: to plant the image of the Führer indelibly in all German hearts.'

Clearly, one could not run the risk of having them sniggering in the privacy of their own homes at this image. Moreover, Hadamovsky himself had produced a body of theoretical writing arguing the greater effectiveness of propaganda when it was consumed by the mass. And it should be remembered that the British, with no desire to have television function as cinema, only managed to sell some 20,000 receivers by the same date. In fact, it can be argued that all these services, and the experiments that preceded them, were premature. What with radio and the talkies, the world was simply not ready for television. Nevertheless, as in Sweden, France, USSR, Holland, Italy, USA and Argentina, television had been on the fringe of

national life for the entire decade.

In Germany, Fernseh AG (Television Ltd) had been established in June 1929 to exploit the Baird patents. It was soon producing mechanical disk scanning machines at a level of greater sophistication than the British. A colleague of Baird's writing in the 50s said that the excellent result achieved by Fernseh 'was in no little measure due to the micrometer precision engineering tools the Germans had available for disk construction.' By 1933 Fernseh were to put the disk into a vacuum and duplicate the interlaced pattern of line scanning used in the electronic systems to produce a 320-line picture.

Fernseh also acquired rights to a rival electronic system to Zworykin's—the image dissector camera invented by the American Philo Farnsworth. This, in common with the mechanical scanners, worked best with extremely bright illumination. In fact, both hardly worked at all in the normal, albeit intense, lighting of a studio. For these systems the direct illumination provided in a telecine device (a chain of machines which convert a film image into a television signal) was best of all. To take advantage of this, Fernseh created the Intermittent Film or IF process. A rapid-development film camera system was mounted above a telecine device using a Farnsworth tube. The camera shot the film and within a minute, still wet, it was dropped into the telecine part of the apparatus to be converted into a television picture. This IF system was only about 1 metre square and was limited, as far as lighting was concerned, by the film's sensitivity rather than the television pick-up tube. Fernseh shared IF with BTDC and Farnsworth's company in the USA.

If Fernseh played the BTDC/Farnsworth role in Germany, Telefunken functioned as EMI/RCA. By the time of the 1936 Olympics, Telefunken equipment operated in competition with that of Fernseh, exactly prefiguring the situation in Britain a few months later. Both camera systems originating Olympic images were capable of 375 lines (i.e. a greater resolution than the 180 lines established as the German standard in 1935). But, as in the UK and even more so in the US, the competition between advanced mechanical scanning and Farnsworth or RCA electronic systems (a competition enshrined in the patents held by the rival companies) obscured the next step.

In Germany, this meant that the 180-line system was maintained by the German Post Office and the Broadcasting Authority until the smoke cleared. Because of the investment in public television halls and a long-line network that linked five cities, this did not occur until November 1938. Then the whole system was moved to a 441-line standard, more in keeping with the capacities of contemporary cameras and receivers. Also, the potential patent war was resolved by Fernseh joining Telefunken as an RCA licence holder in 1937. This move, in advance of the understanding reached

between Farnsworth and RCA in the United States two years later, must have been facilitated by the Reichskulturkammer system, which put all media artistic personnel and media manufacturing industries, including television, under Goebbels' direct control.

The Nazis, unlike the British, did not give up television transmission with the outbreak of war. Television was considered too important to the military research programmes in unmanned weapon guidance systems. Although they closed the television halls, they continued to transmit for morale and propaganda reasons until the Allies bombed the Berlin mast in 1943. After that, programming was put out over the cable network. In Paris the Nazis were transmitting up to a week before the city was liberated. As a continuous broadcast service, therefore, they lasted for eight years, and on the 441-line standard for the better part of five years.

Thus it is clear that the Germans seized the initiative in going with high definition mechanical scanning for a public service. This then locked them into a 180-line standard, even as they themselves produced better resolution with both mechanical and electronic scanning systems. Already in 1935, for instance, at the annual radio show in Berlin all the manufacturers but one were showing 320-line equipment. The British, on the other hand, having inferior mechanical scanning from Baird, held on until late the following year. The advantage gained gave them a 405-line standard by February 1937.

In America the internecine war was between two electronic systems, one from Zworykin at RCA and the other from Farnsworth. The need to contain RCA's patent dominance and let other manufacturers into the nascent television equipment market prevented the start of any full-scale service until after the war. The advantage then gained was a 525-line standard and the possibility of colour (introduced in 1953).

Celebrating this tangle of events requires certain mental gymnastics, especially since a taste of Nazi technological achievement does not come easy. It is no good simply suggesting, as the British pioneers are fond of doing, that 180 lines was not real television. At the time 180 lines *was* indeed high definition—certainly, for instance, by comparison with the 30 lines the BBC was putting out as the Nazis began in 1935. So the dismissal of 180 lines as not being of sufficient quality is ahistorical. It also ignores the fact that the Germans had 375-line equipment, but were using it to feed into their already obsolete system months before the British experiment began.

If you want to celebrate television's beginnings, you should have started in 1982 (at the latest) and you have every right to keep going until, at least, February 1987. Or (remembering that the technology was anyhow essentially American) you could forget the whole thing. ■

Direct Cinema Limited Films & Video

BRITISH INDEPENDENT FILMS

A Bigger Splash



A BIGGER SPLASH is a penetrating impression of the art and lifestyle of David Hockney – one of the most brilliant and successful painters of our time. It is also a new kind of feature film, in which real people play themselves in both actual and dramatized situations.

Produced, directed, written and photographed by Jack Hazan
Written and edited by David Mingay
Presented by Mike Kaplan as a Lagoon release for Circle Associates Ltd.
105 minutes Color

Couples and Robbers

Ladd Company

Academy Award Nomination
Best Short Film 1981



Two couples, one with all the riches dreams are made, and one with only dreams and schemes, are unexpectedly brought together by the plotting of the poorer couple. This charming and sophisticated comedy reveals much about contemporary values.

"Witty and memorable, masterfully directed and performed."
Sheila Benson, *L.A. Times*
Written and directed by Clare Peploe

Produced by C. Oestreicher
29 minutes Color 1984

The Fetch It

A Film by James Hill



THE FETCH IT is a whimsical short story of a writer who is kept from his work by the constant interruptions of his playful dog, Bumble. As his master loses interest in the time-worn game of "fetch-the-ball", Bumble heightens the contest, threatening his position as man's best friend.

18 minutes Color 1984

Rub A Dub Dub



RUB A DUB DUB is a very special collection of animated nursery rhymes for preschool and primary school children. These twenty-five short films are filled with fun, music, and lively invention. America's favorite nursery stories are perfectly presented here for the quick minds of small children.

Produced by David Yates in association with Media Home Entertainment
5 to 6 minutes each Color 1985

A Shocking Accident



A Flamingo Picture
Academy Award 1982
Best Short Film



From the short story, A SHOCKING ACCIDENT by Graham Greene, an English school boy learns that his father has been killed in a bizarre accident. His friends tease him and years later his aunt still relishes the tale. Only when he meets a girl who understands, can he shake off this terrible memory.

Produced by Christine Oestreicher
Directed by James Scott
25 minutes Color 1983

The Spice of Wickedness

Elkador Films



In a sly and sophisticated story of the age-old battle between the sexes, this eighteenth century period film shows how a beautiful and aristocratic wife outwits her wandering husband and gains more than his love in the bargain.

Produced by Sondra Orosz
Directed by Elka Tupiak
24 minutes Color 1984

Broken Rainbow



Academy Award 1986
Best Documentary Feature



BROKEN RAINBOW is about the Navajo Indians of Arizona, 10,000 of whom are being relocated by the Federal Government. Through interviews with traditional Hopi and Navajo leaders, and with Navajo who have already been relocated into tract houses off the reservation, we explore the tragic and far-reaching effects of this ill-conceived program.

Produced by Maria Florio and Victoria Mudd
69 minutes

The Statue of Liberty

Academy Award Nomination
1986
Best Documentary Feature



THE STATUE OF LIBERTY is a lyrical, compelling and provocative film that explores the history of the statue and the meaning of liberty itself on the occasion of the statue's renovation.

Florentine Films
Produced by Buddy Squires and Ken Burns
58 minutes Color 1985

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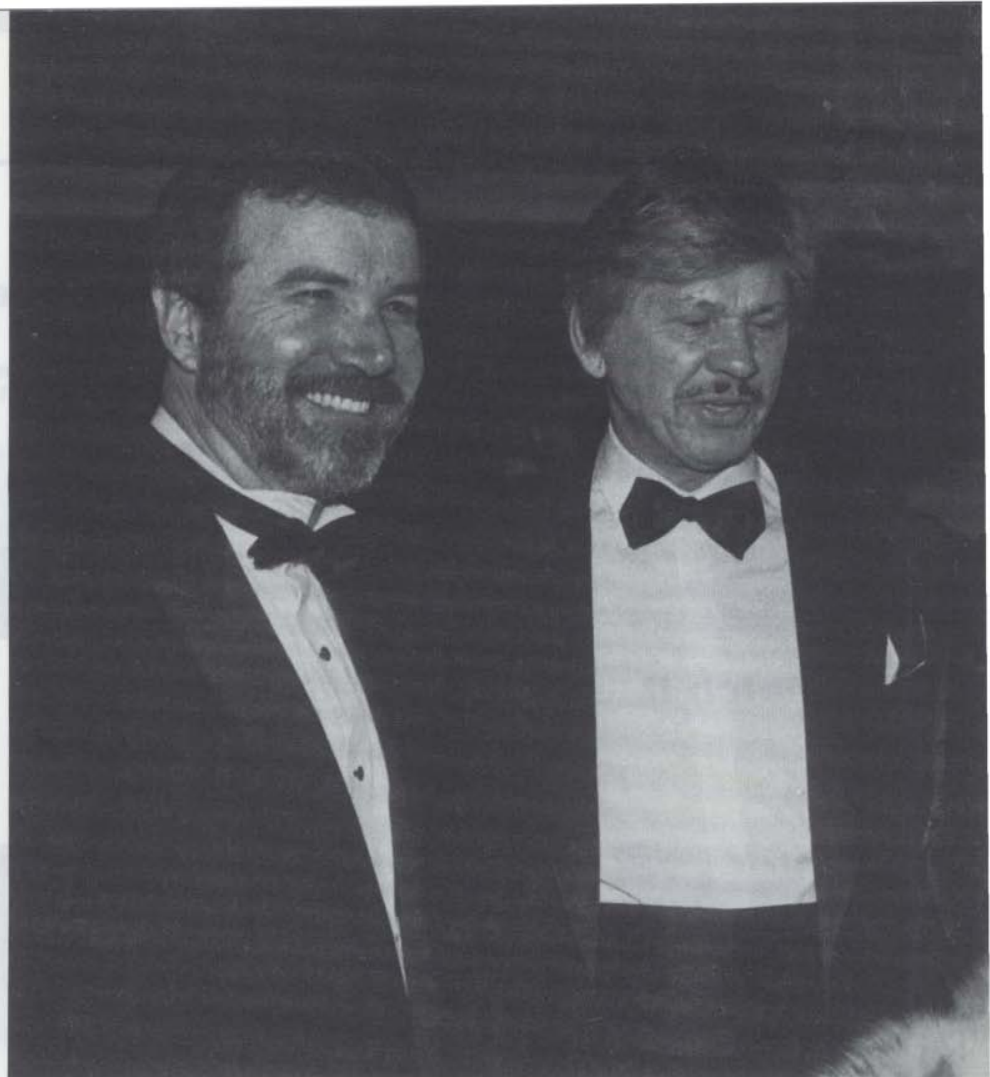
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If you pinned back your ears at any restaurant around London's Wardour Street this summer, you are likely to have heard the same conversation, the same questions. What makes Cannon tick? Where does it get its money? Who fooled whom when it paid £175m for assets that the Australian tycoon Alan Bond had bought only a week before for £125m? Is Cannon steady on its legs?

Cannon is everywhere in London now. Every other cinema seems to bear the Cannon logo and, indeed, impressions are close to the truth. With the acquisition of the 295-screen ABC chain (part of the Thorn EMI Screen Entertainment division that passed briefly through Mr Bond's hands), Cannon is now the biggest single force in British cinemas, with 39% of the screens.

But that is just part of the picture. In continental Europe, it owns the largest cinema chains in Holland and Italy (the latter acquired for \$11m) and 50% of a West German film distributor, Scotia International Filmverleih. In October 1985, it paid \$15m for a new office building on San Vincente Boulevard, Los Angeles (unfashionably and less expensively east of Beverly Hills). It is currently buying a small chain of American cinemas (Commonwealth Theatres) for \$24.5m. And it plans to make 35 films this year (15 more than last year) at an estimated cost of \$149.3m. At this point, the mind begins to blur into a numerical haze.

So let's go back to base and see how



The Boys from

Cannon got there. In fact, you need to go back still further to the early days of the men who, effectively, are Cannon—the two cousins from Tiberias, Israel, Menahem Golan and Yoram Globus. (They were both called Globus originally, but Menahem changed his name for patriotic reasons to celebrate the Golan Heights.)

Golan was an Israeli air-force pilot when he was 19, subsequently became an actor and learnt the art of direction at London's Old Vic. At the age of 23, he became one of Israel's leading stage directors. Switching his métier to the cinema, he went to New York to pick up the skills of film-making, took an informal internship with Roger Corman on the production of *The Young Racers* and then went back to Israel in 1962 to make his first film, *El Dorado*, starring Topol. Golan still makes films to this day, despite his latter-day fame as a movie mogul. Globus, also with a background in the Israeli services, in which he was an army officer, trained at a business school and has remained the figures man of the enterprise. He too, however, has showbusiness in his blood—his

father once owned and ran a cinema outside Haifa.

The two cousins set up in business together in 1963, with the formation of Noah Films in Israel, for which they made a variety of inexpensive youth, sex and exploitation pictures. The best known of these is probably *Lemon Popsicle* (1977). Making films in Israel, where hyper-inflation was a way of life, was not, perhaps, the best background for a pair who wanted to be seen to be able to handle large sums of money in an international environment.

So they set their sights on Hollywood, initially with only limited success. *Lepke*, with Tony Curtis, made at the old Selznick Studios in 1975 and directed by Golan, set no box-office records. Film folk gave the cousins the runaround and would not return their calls. If they were going to be taken seriously in Hollywood, the two men concluded, they would have to have their own American base, so they scouted around for a ready-made candidate. Cannon, which had been set up in New York in 1966, fitted the bill. A producer of cheap erotica (*The Happy Hooker*, *Maid in Sweden*, etc), it

had gone public in 1973 but had come down in the world with the progressive closing of tax loopholes that it had been exploiting. By 1979, it was virtually on its knees and worth only \$500,000 in the stock market.

Golan and Globus wanted it but did not have the money, so they entered into an agreement with the by then willing vendors. In return for taking on the marketing of Cannon's existing library of films, they would be paid a commission sufficient to buy a controlling stake in the company. Within two weeks, after a high-octane trip to Cannes, they had made more money for the company than the previous management had done in ten years. So they ended up in control, with a family stake of around 40% of Cannon. Essentially, they had acquired Cannon to gain the acceptance and credibility their somewhat raffish films had denied them.

Over the next six to seven years, Golan and Globus transformed Cannon. Profits grew from only \$8,000 in 1980 to more than \$15m last year. They achieved this in two ways. First, they set a low average on the amount they were pre-



From left: Yoram Globus, Charles Bronson, Jill Ireland and Menahem Golan.

Tiberias

Alan Stanbrook

pared to spend on their pictures. Where the movie majors thought they were being parsimonious in setting a top limit of \$10m, Cannon aimed for an average cost of half that sum. Secondly, they channelled all their efforts before the start of production into an attempt to pre-license the picture to television, video, overseas markets and every conceivable outlet. As a result, Cannon often attracted enough guarantees in advance of production to cover more than the estimated cost. It is still doing this: this year's \$149.3m production slate is already more than matched by advances and guarantees of \$171.1m. In that respect, Cannon can fairly be said to have removed the risk from production.

Cannon attributes much of its success to this practice of pre-licensing rather than pre-selling the product. Films that cost \$5m are often pre-licensed for \$7m and if they prove box-office successes, Cannon still shares in the revenue. This sounds like an ideal setup and Golan and Globus are not slow to claim that, doing business their way, no film can lose money. The acres of Cannon advertising in the trade press at times like the

Cannes film festival, some of it on behalf of the most unlikely projects, is to some extent a myth. Some of the films are merely gleams in the eye, pictures Cannon would like to make if it could line up adequate advances. If it fails to do so, the titles remain unmade.

Nobody, however, has yet invented an infallible way of making money. In reality, Cannon is as vulnerable as any other company—as is clear from documents that it has to file with America's Securities and Exchange Commission in Washington every time it needs to raise fresh capital.

People who start with insufficient cash to take over a company for \$500,000 and inherit a \$3m debt on eventually acquiring it can survive only by relying heavily on the banks and on outside investors. (In Cannon's case, it also depends to a lesser extent on government subsidies.) At the end of last March, even before it became involved in the purchase of Thorn EMI Screen Entertainment, Cannon was indebted to the tune of \$185.6m and held \$30.1m in advances from subdistributors. Against

this, the company had cash of \$5.4m.

Two substantial lines of credit were available to Cannon—\$45m from the Dutch subsidiary of Crédit Lyonnais and \$65m from a group of American banks, for which First National Bank of Boston was the agent. Though Cannon had at that point drawn only \$38.7m of the American facility, it had already overdrawn the Dutch one by \$2m. Yet within months, Cannon was thinking of spending another \$300m to acquire the EMI interests and Commonwealth Theatres in America. How?

The answer was that it had to tap Wall Street again. In April, it raised \$207m in debentures, which it applied first to paying off its major bank creditors. But that left only \$121.4m—not nearly enough to cover the \$300m acquisitions it soon had in mind. So the company has had to renegotiate fresh loans with its bankers—this time with 'amended covenants'. Among the conditions attaching to the previous loans, for which substantially all the assets of the company, including insurance policies on the lives of Golan and Globus, had already been pledged, were limitations on the incurrence of further debt and restrictions on Cannon's ability to pay dividends to its shareholders. In fact, Cannon has never paid a dividend, so the advantages to shareholders from holding Cannon stock have to come from its performance in the stock market. So far, the stock has performed well. Will it continue to do so?

Some Wall Street analysts are uncertain about Cannon. Its success has been built on making a certain kind of adventure or exploitation picture and keeping the cost down. Such films still figure on the agenda—items like *Texas Chainsaw Massacre II* and *Invaders from Mars* (Tobe Hooper's remake of the 1953 William Cameron Menzies picture). But nowadays, alongside these products, are films of much greater artistic pretension and some much more expensive ones.

Having won a top award at the Berlin film festival with John Cassavetes' *Love Streams*, Golan and Globus have a rather touching hankering after 'respectability'. So they are hiring Jean-Luc Godard to direct Norman Mailer in a film of *King Lear*, putting Alain Resnais under contract, letting Andrei Konchalovsky loose on a number of middle-brow 'think' pictures and encouraging directors like Franco Zeffirelli to film Verdi's *Otello* with Plácido Domingo and Robert Altman to make a movie of the Sam Shepard play *Fool for Love*. Whether or not these pieces succeed artistically, none seems likely to reach a really big audience.

Though the picture may now change, no Cannon film has yet been a major critical success. Supposedly up-market fare like *That Championship Season* and *Maria's Lovers* fell into a kind of cultural chasm. Even some would-be commercial products, such as *Mata Hari* and *Lifeforce* (about sex-crazed space vampires), died in the marketplace.

In future, Cannon will find it much harder to stick to its policy of restricting budgets to an average of \$5m. Several films already completed or in the pipeline will cost much more. Among these are the new Sylvester Stallone picture, *Cobra*, a second film with Stallone (*Over the Top*) and a proposed production of *Superman IV*, the last scheduled to cost some \$24m. This potentially carries a double risk. Big-budget pictures are more likely to overshoot their budget by a wide margin. They also call for skills that, to date, Cannon has seldom needed. Moreover, they will force Cannon to trim back budgets to the bone on smaller pictures if it is to keep to its overall \$5m average cost. This could make the cheaper pictures tackier and, perhaps, less likely to appeal. On shoestring budgets, too, there is risk of overspending simply to achieve minimum professional standards. Hitherto, Cannon has generally eschewed the normal film industry practice of lining up completion bonds. These are a form of insurance that guarantees (for a suitable premium) enough money to complete a production should it exceed its budget. If some future productions are significantly more expensive than the Cannon norm, it may not be able for much longer to afford the luxury of forgoing this safeguard.

Cannon is no longer the simple outfit it was when Golan and Globus acquired it. It is now a multinational, vertically integrated operation, with interests in all three functions of production, distribution and exhibition. This has advantages but also certain drawbacks. For example, by owning substantial cinema chains in Europe, Cannon is able to ensure that its own pictures receive early release dates. However, to the extent that Cannon exhibits its own pictures, it is no longer able to obtain advances and guarantees for theatrical exhibition in other companies' cinemas. In that regard, it may be weakening one of the cornerstones of its policy—the removal or minimising of risk by advance licensing.

The venture into distribution carries risks previously assumed by others. Cannon films were once distributed by MGM/UA, which bore all the costs (for a fee) of prints, publicity and securing suitable playdates. Now almost all Cannon pictures are released through the company's own distribution arm, Cannon Releasing Corporation, which therefore incurs these expenses. Print costs alone can be a hefty item for a new picture. Last autumn, for example, Cannon's *Invasion USA* was booked into 1,700 cinemas across America. There is some scope for economising by means of



Above: *Lemon Popsicle*, (1977)
Cannon's first substantial hit;
right: Karen Black in
Invaders from Mars (1986).

'pairing'—that is, showing one film in, say, the western states of America and another in the east and then switching them so that national exposure is achieved with only half the number of release prints. Also, for the most expensive pictures (*Cobra* and *Superman IV*), distribution is to be handled by Warner Bros. However, there can be no assurance that when Cannon distributes its own films in America, they will pull in enough at the box office to cover the cost—something, of course, that applies to any distribution venture.

Expenditure on prints can often add \$1m to the original production cost of a film and advertising and publicity between \$2m and \$4m. So if 35 films are made this year, prints and publicity may absorb more than \$100m. In that light, the advance guarantees that Cannon has so far lined up begin to seem less impressive. At \$171m, they exceed the estimated negative cost of this year's production slate by some \$22m, but Cannon will need substantially more than this to distribute as well as produce the pictures. Where is the rest to come from? On Wall Street, Jeremiahs are concerned lest the company be caught short of cash to cover its marketing costs. That could force Cannon to mount yet another fund-raising operation—or to rationalise some of the assets it has lately acquired. By the end of June, indeed, there was a working capital deficiency of \$105.5m.

Borrowings and debt capital already cost Cannon plenty in terms of interest charges. Since 1982, interest has shot up from \$2.2m to \$11.9m, including a dramatic rise of two-thirds in 1985 and a further increase of 64% to \$3.3m in the first quarter of 1986. In view of later fund-raising excursions, this item is likely to show a sharp rise this year. Though the Crédit Lyonnais and American bank loans have been repaid, the company is to replace them with a fresh facility. Meanwhile, the two debentures raised in April will have to be serviced. One, for \$126.5m, carries a coupon of 12½% (involving annual payments of \$16.3m); the other, \$80.5m with a



coupon of 8⅞%, attracts payments of \$7.1m. The total of \$23.4m is more than twice as high as last year's interest payments for the whole group. Whatever facilities Cannon subsequently lines up to replace the loans it has redeemed will add to this.

If Cannon is driven to sell surplus assets to improve its balance sheet, one that it insists will not go is EM's Elstree studio. It says that it wants to funnel a proportion of its annual productions (ten this year) through Elstree, which will help to maintain employment levels in the British film industry. That kind of talk wins brownie points in the trade, as does the promise to instal two new screens for every one that may have to be closed. Nevertheless, Cannon is moving into an area that it has formerly been happy to avoid. Studios, after all, imply heavy overheads and lots of staff.



Above: Nastassja Kinski in Andrei Konchalovsky's *Maria's Lovers*; left: Tony Curtis and director Menahem Golan during the *Lepke* shoot.



Another controversial feature of the Cannon group—at least in the minds of those disposed to be sceptical—is the way it accounts for its production expenditure. Cannon amortises its film costs under the so-called 'income forecast' method. Under this convention, film costs in any one period are written off in the ratio that revenue actually earned in that period bears to the management's estimate of the total revenue eventually to be realised. How does this work in practice? Let us say a film costs \$5m and is expected, over the next three years, to bring in \$15m. In the first year, however, revenue is only \$1m (in other words, it fails to light any box-office fires). Under the income forecast method of accounting, the company may simply depreciate one-fifteenth of the cost (\$333,000) in the first year and hope for something better in future years. In practice, films that begin their commercial life slowly seldom get better and this accounting convention sometimes merely postpones the day of reckoning. Cannon, however, says it overcomes this by revising its estimates from time to time in line with experi-

ence, leading to an appropriate increase or decrease in the rate of amortisation. In 1984, for example, it wrote down certain films by \$11.8m. The Securities and Exchange Commission is now looking into the matter.

There is nothing dishonest about income forecast accounting, and in following the practice Cannon is in good cinematic company, but it leads to uncertainty whether a group is depreciating its film costs at a fast enough pace. If it is not, nasty surprises can arise a few years down the road. Or they may not: given the unpredictability of the box office, the most unexpected film can sometimes hit the jackpot and make over-optimistic accounting on other films irrelevant.

Cannon says that amortisation of its film costs was equivalent to 57% of its film distribution revenue in 1984 and 1985 (and 63% in the first quarter of 1986), but this is to compare apples with pears since the rate of amortisation is calculated in relation to estimated revenue rather than revenue actually received. A more interesting figure, perhaps, is the steep, progressive increase in unamortised film costs—from \$79m in 1983 to \$121m in 1984 and to \$213m in 1985. The very large, 76% increase in 1985 is due partly to the production of many more films (20, compared with 12) and partly to the use of more expensive actors and the purchase of costlier scripts. Whatever the reason, there are large film costs yet to be amortised.

The use of bigger stars (those in prospect include not only Sylvester Stallone, but Dustin Hoffman, Diane Keaton and Al Pacino) suggests that Cannon may have to revise its legendary stinginess about conceding 'points' (percentages of revenues or profits) to artists as part of their fees. Until now, if points have been conceded at all, they have

generally been calculated in relation to net revenues. Only for artists with the greatest clout was Cannon prepared to pay a percentage of gross revenues, with a result that the amount paid in 1985 by way of participations was negligible.

As befits executives of their standing and influence, Golan and Globus are paid well. Each is entitled to \$400,000 this year by way of basic salary, rising to \$500,000 by 1988. Last year, when their pay packet was \$350,000, they took only \$150,000 each and deferred compensation of \$200,000, but with additional remuneration by way of stock options and other incentives, their total entitlement came to \$836,000 apiece. (Both Golan and Globus participate in a profit-sharing scheme which, between 1985 and 1988, can add up to a maximum of \$1m to their annual pay.) In addition, they are from time to time allowed to borrow money from the company interest-free and with no fixed repayment date. By the end of last year, they jointly owed \$668,000 under this arrangement. Cannon has also advanced \$1.5m to a group of businesses owned by the cousins to enable them to purchase a studio in Israel. Members of the Globus family will eventually own 50% of this studio and Cannon the other 50%, which will cost it up to \$5m. The interests of Cannon and the Golan/Globus families are close, for the two cousins have in turn lent Cannon \$1¼m to help finance the film *Sahara*, starring Brooke Shields.

What of Cannon's much trumpeted expertise in exhibition? How does that look now that it has owned the 224-screen Classic and Star chains for long enough to smarten up their image? The evidence as yet is mixed. In one respect at least, Cannon suffered a major disappointment in its attempt to turn the old Columbia cinema in Shaftesbury Avenue into a flagship for the group under the new name Premiere. There was much talk of adopting a radically new booking policy to permit one-night stands of specialised films and of duplicating this policy in a handful of other cinemas in the group. In fact, the Premiere experiment was terminated after only a few conventional runs, with Imamura's *Ballad of Narayama* the one conspicuous success. The Columbia-Premiere is now the Curzon West End and the new Premiere is the four-screen complex in the Swiss Centre, playing a familiar package of art-house pictures.

And how have profits and attendances fared? After Cannon acquired the Classic chain, admissions were said rapidly to have improved by 10%. Certainly revenue figures are impressive. Between 1983 and 1985, revenues from cinema operations shot up from \$18m to \$37.5m, thanks to the acquisitions. But operating profits from cinemas fell steadily from \$1.4m to \$418,000. Not until the first quarter of 1986 did the pattern begin to reverse, though it remains to be seen how far this was due to seasonal factors.

What is one to conclude? Occasional misgivings have been voiced about

Cannon's apparent dependence on the chutzpah and style of its two leading lights. Some think the talented duo are taking on too many functions and spreading themselves too thinly. In Los Angeles and at major film festivals they play contemporary versions of Sam Goldwyn and Louis B. Mayer; internationally they conduct their company like a mini-major on two continents; in his spare time, Menahem Golan pursues an active career as a film director.

Cannon has worked till now because, despite appearances, it is not in the same league as the top seven Hollywood majors. Paramount, for example, made more than five times as much profit as Cannon last year. But Hollywood lore says that you must grow or die, and Cannon's recent dramatic expansion makes it difficult to remain the hobby of a pair of workaholics. Strong second-line management, with the autonomy to make its own decisions without referring back constantly to Golan and Globus, is soon likely to become Cannon's top requirement.

Goodwill towards the company has improved markedly since it first tried to take over the EMI film business for £110m last year. Vilified at the time as absentee moguls and asset strippers and not equipped to run such a large chunk of the British film industry, Golan and Globus have overcome this initial prejudice. Partly, it must be said, because the alternative—a management buyout—proved financially impractical, but



Sylvester Stallone in *Cobra*.

also because the cousins' known commitment to the film business found a warmer response than the prospect of control by Alan Bond, a tycoon better known for ocean-racing than for his affection for movies.

How quickly the boys from Tiberias can sort out the EMI film empire is an

open question. They have made a good start by sweeping away managerial dead wood. This had become entrenched since the old EMI entertainment group was taken over by an electronics company with little feel for showbusiness and even less for cinema. Accountants Arthur Young have been running their slide rules over the business all summer and are believed to have encountered more than one surprise.

Meanwhile, there have been short-term matters to deal with, including an inherited contract astonishingly favourable to the American company Gladden Productions. Gladden is owned by David Begelman, the controversial film mogul who became a big shot at MGM after his unhappy departure from Columbia. When projects were cancelled, David Begelman lost no time in slapping in a writ for \$100m for breach of contract, though the dispute has since been settled out of court.

Glitches notwithstanding, Cannon is at pains to stress that the EMI deal is still on. A first instalment of £40m was paid on takeover day and a further £15m at the end of June. Another payment is due in December and the last in May 1987, though some of the payment can be satisfied in shares rather than cash. Alan Bond also collects a seat on the Cannon board and Australian rights in EMI's 2,000-film library—enough to keep his television channel supplied for years to come. In the long run, he may prove the luckiest player in the game. ■

11th Hong Kong International Film Festival

April 10 — 25, 1987

Accredited by the International Federation of Film Producers Associations

Information:

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Parking Deck Floor, KCR Kowloon Station,
8 Cheong Wan Road, Kowloon, Hong Kong.
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Presented by the Urban Council
Hong Kong

LFF thirty

In a few weeks, the thirtieth London Film Festival will be with us—a landmark for an occasion which may still seem a bit of a stripling when set against the dowagers of Cannes and Venice, but a most solid institution in its own right and still energetically spreading. If past form is anything to go by, there will be even more on show this year than last. And in fact, for almost any festival programmer, the problem seems to be to know where to stop.

There's the film that only one of the programme advisers much cares for, but which that one admires inordinately: better have it, he might just be right. Or the film generally, even universally, recognised as a major mistake, but a mistake by a talent whose disasters command bigger audiences than other people's successes: better have that as well. Or the latest over-sold product of the Hollywood youth factory: to look that gift-horse in the mouth might stamp a festival as snobbish, elderly and out of touch. Or the film from some fledgling Third World industry, so far capable of producing work only of real interest to its own nationals, but paradoxically unlikely to advance if it can't claim a seat on the international merry-go-round. There, at least, generosity looks justified.

Do festivals actually lay out their programmes according to these and similar rules, or does it merely look that way? And for all the obvious advantages of wide choice, keeping in touch, the sheer power of numbers, one begins to feel that the time has come for a bit of scaling down. The first festival to proclaim the virtues of more rigorous selection procedures (apart, that is, from the likes of New York, which has remained defiantly small) might find itself heading a trend.

After all, the major impulses towards irresistible growth are themselves now getting on a bit. Impulse one, perhaps, was that quaint 1960s notion, still apparently enshrined in some of our infant schools, that competitions, races, and by extension strict principles of selection, smacked of dangerous elitism. Early festivals proclaimed that they were trying to show the best: it became safer merely to try to show the most. Impulse two sprang from the canny reactions of the old-timers to the disruptions of 1968. Faced with the possibility of alternative festivals, of years of bickering and political agitation and fighting over funds, Cannes and the like smoothly incorporated the opposition, enlarged themselves and went on their way, towing other festivals behind them. Thirdly, there was the great new source of supply that opened up when the commercial companies, notably the Hollywood companies, changed their tune. Thirty years ago, the only Hollywood films that a festival like London could hope to com-



The Laplanders: odd film out from 1957.

mand were those virtually condemned by their own distributors: rejects thrown on to the street or into the art-houses. A festival screening was thought to label a film instantly and irrevocably as too arty for comfort. The festivals worked so hard to change this view that when it did change, with a new brand of film executive and new attitudes all round, they may have been overcome by the sheer excitement of it all.

It's a very long way from 1957 and the first London Film Festival, whose 15-feature programme is to be replayed in November at the National Film Theatre. And, one might add, what a programme: Kurosawa (*Throne of Blood*), Wajda (*Kanal*), Ray (*Aparajito*), Bergman (*The Seventh Seal*), Clair (*Porte des Lilas*), Visconti (*Notti Bianche*), Fellini (*Le Notti di Cabiria*). The only English-language film was Kazan's *A Face in the Crowd*: interesting, uncommercial, precisely fitting the category of the work having nothing to lose by showing its face at a festival. There was Imre Feher's *A Sunday Romance*, one of a spate of Hungarian films then exciting attention; Chukrai's *The Forty-First*, and Leopoldo Torre Nilsson's exotic *The House of the Angel*. About the only title that rings no bells at all in 1986 is something Norwegian called *The Laplanders*.

There was nothing from Britain. The whole accent of the programme was unremittently and unmistakably towards 'quality' and the art-house. The festival, in effect, is like a monument to attitudes to cinema long held, and by now long since buried. Change, as it gradually came about, was inevitable and desirable: anything else would have meant pouring on the embalming fluid. A glance down the 1957 titles, however, does yield

one rather unexpected speculation. Last year's festival showed more than ten times as many films as the first one. But will there turn out to have been as many as eight whose names and qualities will still be instantly recognisable thirty years on? It may turn out to be so, but I wouldn't bet on it.

Russian roulette

I liked the part where the girl chopped off her dad's head and ate it as a birthday cake. . . 'I liked when the creature pulled the old man's little toe off. . . ' It's obviously not very desirable that 10-year-old children—Australian children, as it happens—should be recalling such delights, particularly as they haven't had the advantage of reading the newsletter of the National Coalition on Television Violence, from which the quotations are taken, and which would have informed them about many more examples of unseemly behaviour on screen.

The NCTV is the American counterpart of Mrs Whitehouse's National Viewers and Listeners Association. Its newsletters, with which I seem recently to have been bombarded, make depressing reading, in every sense. The NCTV rates current films on a violence scale which runs, in the April-May issue, from *American Ninja* (217 points: 'shooting, wrestling, punching, murders with tire rod, lug wrench, screwdriver, spade, bow and arrow, chain, pickaxe, sword, hand grenade, laser gun'), by way of Disney's *The Black Cauldron* (44 points: 'sword fights, threats with hot coals, shoving into boiling pot, choking, knockout, biting, hitting, repeated axe attacks') and so



Colin Dexter and Julian Mitchell at Brasenose.

on down to such innocents as *A Chorus Line* (0 points: 'one grab').

The catalogue of screen violence is fairly sickening ('repeated cannibalism, decapitation, hole drilled in man's head'; 'a woman is forced to eat glass . . . a woman is pushed into a high voltage generator'). But it's not exactly cheering to think of people sitting there clocking it all up, even down to a Three Stooges episode seen on tv during a film.

In *Cobra*, we're told, 'Stallone kills four times as many people as the entire Miami police force did in the whole of 1985.' *Rambo* rates '161 brutal violent acts per hour.' The NCTV is agitated about television screenings of *The Deer Hunter*, claiming that 43 silly people (including three in Lebanon, of all places) have killed themselves playing Russian roulette after watching the film. ('One of the four non-dead victims was a White House secret service agent.')

On television, the NCTV is just as worried about alcohol. The series *Cheers* (which is set in a bar) racks up 62 alcoholic drinks per hour; *Dallas* scores nine drinks, *Dynasty* a mere six. There's a rather bloodthirsty suggestion that 'several leading characters on tv [should] develop alcoholism and die,' in the interest of 'showing the consequences of alcohol more realistically.' Among films, I am sorry to say, *A Private Function* is found guilty not only of 'alcohol use' but of 'glorifying' alcohol.

Screen violence is unpleasant, probably harmful, and getting worse. It is right that attention should be directed to it. The problem with this particular form of attention is that, by the time one has ploughed through one of the NCTV's communications, one might well feel in the mood for an old-fashioned violent movie; or, better still, one that glorifies alcohol.

High tees

Oxford, on a sunny morning. We are standing in the quadrangle at Brasenose, idly wondering whether the little group assembling across the way, with that slightly uneasy, rumpled look so characteristic of academic gatherings, are extras, as we suppose, or might just possibly be the real thing. Extras, of course. They are smartly marched off for a cocktail party scene in the BNC hall.

A portrait of Dr Runcie beams down on them. Colin Dexter, author of *The Silent World of Nicholas Quinn*, the book being filmed here, is reminded of a crossword clue of perfect elegance and concision: 'One put in to manage Church of England.' Dexter composes a regular crossword for the *Oxford Times*, which seems to place him squarely in a lengthy tradition of university puzzlers. But in fact Dexter's style, and that of his detective, Inspector Morse, is town rather than gown, some way from high table high jinks as practised by Fen and Appleby. Morse is more likely to be found waiting for a bus to Wolvercote or Kidlington, those villages north of Oxford which are Dexter's particular stamping ground.

The television series based on three of Dexter's novels—other titles being filmed are *The Dead of Jericho* and *Service of All the Dead*—can hardly be blamed if it shifts the action a bit towards the centre. It would be carrying self-restraint almost too far to film in Oxford without filming Oxford. Kenny McBain is producing the Morse series for Zenith and Central Television: three two-hour features, although it hasn't yet been decided whether they will be shown as such or split into slices.

Julian Mitchell, who is scripting two of the films, comes new to this particular line of work. 'There are more bodies than I expected,' he says of *Service of All the Dead*, where the bodies include a vicar who topples from his church tower almost at his parishioners' feet. *Nicholas Quinn* hinges on some hanky-panky about selling exam secrets to the sheiks. In *Service of All the Dead* the church is positively littered with corpses, though the murders Morse is investigating are set mainly in the past. Mitchell has moved the action forward, to avoid the elaboration of flashback, and hopes Colin Dexter won't be worried by the shift. But today what seems mainly to be agitating both writers is their own brief appearances in a scene to be shot during the afternoon. Julian Mitchell is having second thoughts about a brilliant scarlet tie and appealing urgently for something sub fusc. Colin Dexter is remembering the walk-on role he has already done, in *The Dead of Jericho*. 'I asked what I should do. Look left; look right? What was I supposed to be thinking?' 'Try not do anything,' he was told. 'Just walk.'

John Thaw, who plays Morse, is not filming today. He is, however, having a finger bandaged by the unit's first aid expert. Thaw has been stung by a horsefly; Morse, too, would be more likely to be attacked by horseflies than by men with guns. With this crew, one feels that the English detective story is safe on its home ground, with no hankering to convert the middle-aged, edgy maverick of the Thames Valley force into something more chic and Californian.

Are there, perhaps, too many detective stories on tv, asks Patrick Harbison of Central over lunch. That's as maybe, but there are certainly too many detectives today in Oxford. Somewhere in the city, though not in Somerville, the novel's rightful home, Peter Wimsey and Harriet Vane are said to be tackling the poison-pen mystery of Dorothy Sayers' *Gaudy Night* for a BBC film. And Miss Marple is reported to be in action at Oriol, also for the BBC. Possibly, if one waited long enough in Oriol, all the detectives of Oxford fiction would pass in front of one. When we arrive there, it's to encounter only a prop man spotted earlier in the day at BNC. Miss Marple, it seems, has moved on to Woodstock; the place is now being readied for Inspector Morse, due to switch colleges tomorrow.

An hour or so later, I duly catch up with Miss Marple (Joan Hickson), standing patiently if perhaps a trifle wearily on the pavement in Woodstock, wearing clothes too warm for the day. She is endeavouring to make an entrance to the Blenheim teasshop, a simple action only effected after two takes of a short tracking shot (there have, I suspect, been several goes at this shot before I get there) and five takes of a shot in the doorway. Miss Hickson, I'm told, is eighty today: there could be better ways of enjoying one's birthday.

'Don't hold the traffic, Mary, until I say Hold the Traffic,' bellows the woman assistant. 'Now, Mary, Hold the Traffic.' Mary throws herself bodily in front of a car. The small crowd of tourists and on-lookers stops muttering ('Nothing much to see, dear, is there? Boring, I'd call it') and obligingly freezes. Overhead, a light aircraft begins to drone and circle. More traffic, more shouting, more muttering ('Drive me barmy all this waiting. I tell you that straight'), as they snatch takes between the cars and the aircraft. I commiserate with the series producer, Guy Slater, about this standard hazard of location shooting. They have gone to a good deal of trouble, he says, to find the quietest of Woodstock's many tea-shops.

The new Marple story is based on *Nemesis*, Agatha Christie's last book. There are crossword clues to be followed up as she joins a tour of historic houses (Blenheim today; on shortly to Stourhead). The producers of this series have been very canny. They have acquired the definitive Miss Marple in Joan Hickson, a watchful, slow-spoken old lady with a mind and a conscience, at home in a village, and they have spent money where it shows, on period and prettification. *Nemesis*, with stately homes thrown in, looks a natural for the American market. And perhaps for the Chinese, who were recently reported to have bought Miss Marple.

It seems a pity not to round off the hat-trick, so it's back to *BBC* in the hope that some of the Morse crew can set me on the *Gaudy Night* trail. Prop men and unit caterers, almost invariably, know the exact whereabouts of any other unit in the vicinity, far more reliably than press offices. But this time even they are vague, and *Gaudy Night* has to go unvisited. Instead, I look in on my former tutor and get a final flavour of Oxford. She knows the Morse stories: rates him as a detective $\beta+$. A little better than that, I suggest. Yes, perhaps, $\beta++$.

Joan Hickson as Miss Marple.



Michael Powell shooting *A Canterbury Tale* in the Cathedral.

Cavalry charge

How many books of real distinction have been written by film-makers (in English, that is)? It might not be too easy to fill more than a shelf. So it seems particularly good news that there are three books currently around—one no longer new, one new to Britain, and one brand new—in which, rather unfairly, film-makers write the socks off most of the professionals at the game.

The first is *Money into Light*, John Boorman's account of the making of *The Emerald Forest*, published last year, and widely and rightly praised. The second is John Houseman's *Unfinished Business* (Chatto & Windus). Houseman wrote his autobiography during the 70s, and of its three volumes only the first, *Run-Through*, which included his stirring account of life with Orson, has previously been published in Britain. A shrewd condensation into one handy omnibus volume should now make this urbane, spirited and beautifully crafted memoir much more widely available. Houseman has met everyone and been everywhere, from his English childhood to his improbable late flowering career as a movie star, called on to represent the voice of civilised authority in a world where such voices are increasingly rare. Along the way, one has always particularly relished the notion of Houseman and Raymond Chandler working together on the tough thriller *The Blue Dahlia*, and commiserating with each other as public school boys adrift in Hollywood.

But the revelation, the nonpareil, is Michael Powell's *A Life in Movies*, due from Heinemann at the end of October. Michael Powell is not the most disciplined of writers. He takes more than 600 pages to get himself to *The Red Shoes*, which is where this volume ends, and doesn't even break his text into chapters. But it's a spellbinder's volume every inch

of the way, as wily as it is honest. And almost the best of it is Powell's account of a childhood in which the boy can be most clearly seen as father to the film-maker. During the First World War, soldiers were billeted on his mother's Kentish farm, and there's a sublime page describing how the young Michael lined up his pony with the troop out exercising, the only British film-maker to have ridden in a cavalry charge. No wonder that after that there was no holding him.

Bunker shot

This year's American PGA Championship ended on the highest dramatic note, with Bob Tway holing out from a bunker at the final hole to pip Greg Norman, who only an hour or so earlier had looked invincible. For all that, there was a curious feeling that the American tv coverage had almost muffed it, catching the crucial shot, as it were, rather from the corner of its eye—though rapid amends were made, of course, with replays from every angle. How different, one was left smugly thinking, from our own dear *BBC*.

Whenever British television shows American golf without putting on its own commentary, complaints are to be expected. Even in such quiet backwaters of television, national differences intriguingly assert themselves. The *BBC* viewer, raised in the tradition set by the late, great Henry Longhurst, expects the commentary to be relaxed, calm and as informative as possible. The Americans prefer crosstalk in the commentary box.

Differences in shooting style are also to the point. The *BBC* style is so unchangingly assured that I had imagined veteran crews, experts in this particular kind of sports shooting. Not so, it seems. Harold Anderson, the *BBC* producer, tells me that cameramen may be drafted in from any area of tv work. For the Open, he musters 22 cameras (and rather more cameramen, to allow for shift changes and meal breaks); for a lesser tournament, about 10 cameras. The Americans had 30 on hand for the PGA. The *BBC* keep pulling back from the action, to draw in a sense of the crowd and the setting (Turnberry, for this year's Open, matchlessly dramatic in its changing lights). The Americans don't build the game's own natural pauses into the shooting style, preferring swifter and more restless cutting between camera positions.

Each to his own. The Americans, one could say, package golf for the show-business of television; the British allow the game more chance to speak for itself. When I ask Harold Anderson about that feeling of something not quite right on the last green of the PGA, he tells me that the networks were just coming out of a commercial break: Bob Tway's historic shot just by a whisker, he thinks, made it live on to their screens.

KOCKENLOCKER

The
Nine Lives of
MICHAEL POWELL



They have just burnt down the hayrick in the farmyard. 'It was the most awful event of my young life. I was too small to be blamed (although I am sure I had been an enthusiastic accomplice) and my brother was locked in our bedroom "until your father comes back from Canterbury." He let down a string from the window to which I attached a basket—I may have had the help of Ernest, son of the waggoner—with a very red apple in it; or it may have been a tomato...'

The child is father to the man. When the adult Michael Powell has not been indulging in the cinematic equivalent of rick-burning—and gleefully claiming credit for it—he has been trying, for the sake of his marathon memoir, to remember exactly how it was, just who did what when. The reference to Canterbury, where the Tales come from (or more precisely where they are going to), is also obviously significant, reminding us that Powell has always been almost aggressively English and very keen to celebrate what he sees as the fabric of England, a sense of which he insists he acquired in his Kentish country childhood. And above all there is the matter of the apple, or was it a tomato? The exact nature of the fruit is of course immaterial: what matters is the indication that, even from 'the pinafore stage', his mind and memory worked in images, and specifically colour images. He does not remember, and probably does not care, exactly what was in that basket. But he certainly remembers that it was round and red.

Another significant quote, this time from near the end of *A Life in Movies*, the marathon memoir in question (actually on page 514, which is still more than 150 pages shy of the end, but then, who's counting?). Powell is in the middle of one of his major narrative loops, when suddenly he inquires:

'Do I digress? Well, I digress. This book is not a history of the movie business, but the story of one man's love-hate relationship with it. Art has its historian in every century. From Benvenuto Cellini to Kenneth Clark, we learn most from their personal memories, experiences, opinions. Do I claim to sit with the Masters? Yes I do. I served my apprenticeship and I became a master in my chosen profession in the twentieth century. I am writing this lengthy book because I conceive of it as my duty to do so, but I should be making a film about it. There are not many men in my profession who have had my experience and are still alive and who can get it all down.'

It is interesting to compare the attitudes voiced here with those in the preface to Powell's book *Graf Spee* (1956), where, after describing his gathering of material for his film *The Battle of the River Plate*, he says: 'I began to wish that this varied and unique experience could be preserved in some more permanent shape than a film. I have two sons. I wanted them to read this story and possess it. I wanted unborn boys and girls to pick it up one day and read it and absorb it into their experience. A film

JOHN RUSSELL TAYLOR

reviews Michael Powell's
autobiography

'A Life in Movies'

to be published on 27 October
by William Heinemann (£14.95)

can entertain millions, but it can seldom be possessed by them. A book can; and that is why I have written this book.' It seems that Powell's views on the relative durability of the film and the written word have changed meanwhile: can the video revolution and the possessability of video have had something to do with it?

The child may be father to the man, but the style is the man. Michael Powell, as he seems to be warning us, has to be taken whole, or not at all. And the same goes for his impossible, infuriating, totally fascinating book. At least he does not in any way try to con us into believing that he is or ever has been a model of sweet reasonableness. When longtime associates fall by the wayside, as from time to time they do—Erwin Hillier in favour of Jack Cardiff on page 500, Allen Gray in favour of Brian Easdale on page 582, Alfred Junge in favour of Hein Heckroth on page 628—he does not gloss over the fact that it was because, in necessary ruthlessness, he felt that the replacement was better able to do what he wanted. Finally in Junge's case he comes out with the gist of it: 'When one of my collaborators tells me that I want to go too far, that's the end of the collaboration.' It will be interesting to find out in the predicted follow-up, to cover the years after *The Red Shoes*, exactly why he parted company with Emeric Pressburger, who is always in this volume spoken of with the utmost affection and respect.

Pressburger, in fact, is the key to the other side of Powell's nature. Presumptuous he may be, claiming mastery for himself, but then it is, after all, no more or less than the fact of the matter, and it is only our timid English taste for modesty (even if false modesty) and understatement that makes us feel he should not be the one to say it. But equally when it comes to giving credit to others, he is, again without modesty, absolutely unstinting: he explains just why *The Archers* took the extraordinary step of crediting themselves jointly and indissolubly. It is concerning the credits for films subsequent to *49th Parallel*, and Powell is talking to his agent, Chris Mann:

'We are going to pool our talents and show the film industry we know what the priorities are. We are going to share the final title in the credits, and it is

going to read 'Written, Produced and Directed by Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger'."

"What do you mean by priorities?" he asked.

"It's in the title," I replied. "The story and the script are the most important thing. Then we have to find the money and boss the show—that's the produced by bit—and then I have to direct it."

"Will Emeric be on the floor too," inquired Chris, now prepared for anything.

"Only if he wants to be," I answered. "When I get going, I wouldn't know whether he was there or not. Of course we share all major decisions together and that's where the co-producer comes in. Personally, I think it's extremely generous of Emeric to share with me the title of original story writer and screen-writer."

"You won't get many people in the business to agree with you," said Chris grimly, making another note.

Possibly the last line is there to nudge us a bit about just how generous Powell is really being, but even so it does show remarkable fairness of mind in one who elsewhere characterises himself as 'quick, febrile, impatient and rude'.

Actually, whether Powell is generous to his collaborators (or simply, according to his lights, realistic about them, for good or ill) remains of strictly marginal relevance. There is no doubt that the prime factor in his films has always been his dominant, even domineering personality. And it has always been the major stumbling block to his unqualified acceptance as a great film-maker in Britain that one has therefore to take him all in all. How different from the sorts of film-maker that we generally approve: a Richard Attenborough, say, is always easier to cope with than a Lindsay Anderson. In Powell's case he was always being set against Michael Balcon's obliging team-workers at Ealing (Powell, incidentally, has some revealing things to say about Balcon's 'divide and rule' techniques, using the appearance of a happy team to get its members to keep one another in check); or against the likes of David Lean (about whom Powell is generously enthusiastic), who achieved the classic English virtue of unexceptionable good taste clothed in unmatched professional technique.

Powell has always been much more challenging: he always put himself on the line, and if he was vulgar, showy, unreliable and emotionally suspect, he was also brilliant, imaginative, inventive, ready to take risks, heart and soul, head to toe a film-maker. The diametrical opposite, one might say, of Victor Saville, whom he describes, crisply but not unamicably, as 'cool-headed, detached, kind and thoughtful, meticulous and far-seeing, who would never make an unsuccessful film, nor direct a good one.' Saville, it seems, had all the gentlemanly virtues; Powell has none. Certainly not in his book. The chap, after all, must be a bit of a bounder to be so open about his affairs with ladies famous and less famous, to reflect on the

oddity, in his life at any rate, of having his two mistresses, one ex (Deborah Kerr) and one current (Kathleen Byron) working for him in the same picture (*Black Narcissus*).

Or how about this, as a summary of his first marriage: 'I also got married. Her name was—but what does it matter what her name was? It lasted three weeks. She was beautiful, young, strong, healthy, American—and just about the last person to be made happy by me, and vice versa.'

'In 1927 I was slim, arrogant, intelligent, foolish, shy, cocksure, dreamy and irritating to any sensible woman who had her fortune to make and a family to plan.'

'Today I am no longer slim.'

There you have the man as well as the marriage in a nutshell. Outrageous, no doubt; but deliberately, knowingly so. We can guess from this that many of the most provocative aspects of his films were also put there deliberately to shock, to astonish, to find out just how far he could go too far. He frequently points out as much, tellingly observing to those who found the blood in the last scene of *The Red Shoes* disturbing and unsuited to what was, after all, a fairytale, that they can never have read the original and should remember that there the girl actually has to have her feet chopped off. It is a story about overwhelming, uncontrollable obsession, not about the gentilities of an English drawing-room at teatime. He gently mocks the British critics for having reacted with such outrage not only to *Peeping Tom* but also, at about the same time, to *Psycho*. (And indeed, a detailed comparison of the two cinematic monsters, Powell and Hitchcock, designed to work out why one was generally acceptable in his monstrosity and the other wasn't, might well be revealing.)

Powell is in general very good on the elements of deliberate provocation in his films, whether it was political provocation, as in *Colonel Blimp*, or provocation to contemporary materialism, as in *I Know Where I'm Going* or *A Canterbury Tale* (which, though he obviously likes it, he readily admits to be a flawed film that never quite managed to fuse its elements as he intended), or sexual provocation, as in *Black Narcissus*. He is not so good on the elements of strictly aesthetic provocation, perhaps because he is still not fully aware of them. Does he see the possibility that the noveletish side of many of his films' scripts (*The Red Shoes* is a useful example) would never quite bear the weight of other significances he wanted to load upon them?

His mind and interests were certainly elsewhere: in his discussion of his gradual progress towards the ideal of the 'composed' film, where music and colour and movement within the frame and movement of the frame would all coalesce into one complex and indivisible whole, it is clear that the literary aspects of a script do not, in detail, interest him very much. The grand design, the great impalpable message, yes, but hardly at all

the dramaturgical nuts and bolts. To try to tie him down to them would be like trying to persuade Berlioz to fit in with the conventional requirements of the musical theatre or the symphony hall of his time. (Now there is a subject for a thesis: 'The Artistic Personalities of Berlioz and Michael Powell: Compare and Contrast.') But even if the aims are higher and more comprehensive, the literary shortfall also has to be taken into account: the trouble with the 'composed' film is that everything has to work equally well if the right fusion is to be totally achieved.

The basic fact of the matter is that Powell—as the parallel with Berlioz implies—is a full-blown Romantic artist a bit out of his time. Put back in the company of Berlioz and Byron, Shelley and Delacroix, he makes immediate sense: we know exactly what we may and may not expect of him. Splendours and miseries, stunning original concepts flawed in the execution, egomaniacal frenzy moderated at the most unexpected moments by surprising cynical realism, the colours, the lights and the music which numb the intellect and the petty, nagging reservations that still somehow persist. The irritations are immense, but so are the rewards. So it is with Powell's films, and so it is with the book he has written about them and about himself—as though the two concepts are in any way divisible.

Easy to say that Powell the filmmaker always needed a good, tough, masterful producer—though impossible to know whether he could have functioned in such a situation, at least later than *The Thief of Bagdad* (which oddly enough he always spells 'Baghdad', in cheerful disregard of the film's credits). It is just as easy to say that on the book he needed a good, tough, knowledgeable editor; but equally difficult to guess whether he could have worked as effectively, or at all, under such discipline. He observes at the end that 'Heinemann's chief editor . . . has blitzkrieged his way through this book, and left it one hundred pages lighter.' And there are certainly other things that a quick-witted—and cinematically knowing—reader should have done.

It is fair enough that Powell disclaims all desire to be a film historian. But in that case, he should be carefully checked whenever he makes statements which are not derived directly from his own experience. If he really, as he says, 'worshipped' King Vidor, he might perhaps have realised that *Duel in the Sun* was not Vidor's first Technicolor film; but if he did not, someone else should have. Someone should have seen that Carol Goodner could hardly have played on stage the role in *Grand Hotel* that Jean Harlow played in the film (!), or that the unknown protégée likely to be boosted by Hal Wallis for the Kim Hunter role in *A Matter of Life and Death* could hardly, in 1945, have been Veronica Lake—presumably he is thinking of Elizabeth Scott. Nor, on a different level, can it be strictly necessary that we be told *A Matter of Life and Death* was

irritatingly retitled *Stairway to Heaven* in the States just about every time the film crops up.

But then again, take him all in all . . . These small slips, though mildly tiresome, do little to invalidate the book as a whole. In everything that concerns his own experience, Powell appears to have total recall, even though his accounts are coloured inevitably by his own viewpoint (and what is the point of writing an autobiography unless that can be so?). He is also a compelling story-teller, even when he pushes cliff-hanging to the utmost.

A typical, if extreme, example is his treatment of his affair with Deborah Kerr, which he brings to a crucial point on page 418, then goes off to Gibraltar on *The Volunteer*, which leads to consideration of *The Silver Fleet* and the business of producing without directing, which leads on to the later history of Cineguild, his views on David Lean and so on. He remarks in passing, 'I have drifted downstream a year or two . . .' and then continues to drift even further. Deborah Kerr makes a momentary appearance on page 422, then is not back again until page 436, and the question of what their relationship is going to be, posed dramatically on page 418, is not finally resolved until page 440. Yet he holds you with his glittering eye, and the book may be maddening, but is quite unput-downable. Pity the poor editor who tried to reorder it into a more conventional length and shape.

Amazing survivor Powell certainly is, not so much in his chronological longevity—now 81, he is only a year older than the perennially busy Huston—and his brightness of mind and response, as in his unrepentant Edwardianism. As a person, he belongs to the era when a man had 'mistresses' and tended to judge the women he worked with primarily for their efficacy as sex-objects, to himself at least, and would feel so confident of his sexual normality that he could afford to be glowingly detailed about the physical attractions (or otherwise) of the men he encountered and even grow emotional about 'how beautiful the love of one man for another can be' (Powell is talking about Nigel Balchin and James Mason) without *arrière pensée*.

He could always see the virtues and values of the old *Blimp* as well as of the young soldier eager to push him out of the way. He always admired the military mystique and the social order where servants and colonials knew their place (and could, if they were tough and deserving enough, exchange it for something better). He had, and has, a deep feeling for the presence of the past in the present, the continuity of the dark gods moving our lives in unpredictable directions under the polite surface of things. He has never believed much in reason. If one could imagine some crazy cross between G. A. Henty and Arthur Machin, with twice the talent of the two put together, that would be pretty near the mark. And that is why, even today, he remains such a contentious figure. ■

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The New Film History

THOMAS ELSAESSER

For anyone following specialised film magazines like *Cinema Journal*, *Wide Angle*, *Film Reader*, *Iris*, *Quarterly Review of Film Studies* or *Screen*, it hardly comes as a surprise that after the wave of film theory, one of the busiest areas of publishing recently has been in film history. Two types of pressure have produced the New Film History: a polemical dissatisfaction with the surveys and overviews, the tales of pioneers and adventurers that for too long passed as film histories; and sober arguments among professionals now that, thanks to preservation and restoration projects by the world's archives, much more material has become available, for instance on the early silent period. The cinema is undergoing its biggest changes for many decades. A new interest in its beginnings is justified by the very fact that we might be witnessing the end: movies on the big screen could soon be the exception rather than the rule. Already, public exhibition is just one phase in the life of the multi-media product known as film.

'What is film history?' ask the authors of *Film History Theory and Practice*, and the answer that emerges in the very first pages is that it is a subject needing to be taught: 'It is quite probable that cinema studies was the fastest growing academic discipline in American universities between 1965 and 1975. In 1967

some 200 colleges offered courses in film. Ten years later the number had passed 1,000 . . . This boom in film study gave rise to a huge demand for film scholar-

FILM HISTORY
THEORY AND PRACTICE
by Robert C. Allen and Douglas Gomery
(Knopf/\$19.95. 1985)

FILM STYLE AND TECHNOLOGY:
HISTORY AND ANALYSIS
by Barry Salt
(Starword/£16. 1983)

CINEMA AND TECHNOLOGY:
IMAGE, SOUND, COLOUR
by Steve Neale
(BFI/Macmillan/£6.95, paper. 1985)

FILM SOUND
THEORY AND PRACTICE
edited by Elisabeth Weis and John Belton
(Columbia University Press
\$14.50. 1985)

ship . . . Because of the spectacular growth of film as an academic discipline, the demand for film history books has far outrun the pace of original research . . .'

An academic discipline starts life in a militant, secessionist mood. Film History has been carved out of Film Studies, itself the result of a war of

independence against English Literature, Mass Communication Studies, American Studies, Modern Language Departments. But just as a country only exists when its boundaries have been drawn and its landmarks established, so does the discipline. With Douglas Gomery and Robert C. Allen's book, *Film History* now has its own Ordnance Survey map: a textbook guide to the textbooks which gives reliable information about the known sights, points out where the terrain gets murky and indicates where the map is still white. *Film History Theory and Practice* takes the reader firmly by the hand ('rest assured that the path will lead back to the movies'); there are plenty of wayside stops for stragglers to catch up, and enough do-it-yourself projects and exercises to justify the practice part of the title for anyone put off by theory.

The authors, however, are no popularisers. Each is a highly skilled, trail-blazingly original historian in his own field (Allen for the interaction of the cinema with other entertainment media, especially vaudeville; Gomery made his reputation as an economic historian, changing our views about the coming of sound but also revitalising local film history with studies about Milwaukee and Chicago). Pooling their considerable experience as teachers and researchers, they have written what on another level

is a very ambitious study in film historiography or meta-film history. For what hides modestly and deceptively inside this how-to and how-not-to guide is nothing less than a critique and challenge to an activity which dates back as far as Terry Ramsaye's *A Million and One Nights*.

The basic problems about 'doing' film history are the same as with any other form of history: what is the object of study, what counts as evidence and, finally, what is being explained. One's first surprise, therefore, with *Film History* is that the films themselves are not the object of study. The chapter devoted to film evidence talks about the fragility of film and the difficulties of preservation, the staggering number of films lost and how poor are many of the prints that have survived. But it says next to nothing about what in films themselves might be of historical interest: 'It is true that for one narrow form of film historical inquiry prints of films are the only valid data. However, for broader (and more interesting) questions, we think, non-filmic materials prove invaluable. For certain investigations film viewing is really an inappropriate research method.'

This last sentence has, like so much in the book, the virtue of clarity. To be fair, the authors want to argue against the laziness and diffidence of scholars who, because of preservation problems, 'see the scope of "answerable" film historical questions to be extremely limited.' But if one goes to the chapters devoted to Aesthetic and Social Film History, where one might expect to find something about the, after all, quite considerable number of films we do possess, the case studies (one on Murnau's *Sunrise*, the other on Joan Crawford's role as a star) concentrate mainly on the many different discourses that marketing or publicity create so that a film, a director or an actor may function as a recognition sign for the consumer.

Generality in this area is no accident: it might be taken as one of the defining characteristics of the New Film History,

which has resolutely turned its back on interpretation and on the question of what beliefs or ideas films shape and transmit. This is in marked contrast to the celebration of the director's personal vision during the 1960s, the decade of auteurism. It even makes a change from the interest in social or collective value systems that preoccupied the 1970s, with its insistence on stereotypes and ideology.

But here the books under review also differ crucially in attitude and tone. Although they finally but firmly reject his use of ideology as an explanatory model, Allen and Gomery give ample and sympathetic space to Jean-Louis Comolli, an important French source for rethinking film history. Barry Salt, on the other hand, takes time off in his opening chapters for a sustained attack on what he calls French Film Theory into English. His own position, 'Scientific Realism' (parallel to the relation that exists between science, technology and the real world. The rest is just words'), is very much concerned with films, their analysis, classification and evaluation. Steve Neale's approach to film technology, and many of his quotations about its wider significance, come from 'French Film Theory into English'. Weis and Belton's collection on Film Sound, with contributions from Gomery, Salt, David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, Noël Burch, Christian Metz, Arthur Knight, among others, represents a range of views from Old and New History, American Theory and French Theory.

It would therefore be too simple to say that the study of film, as it became institutionalised in the 1970s, progressively shed its radical origins in favour of more limited but factually more secure investigations. Academic legitimation has made the subject aspire towards scientific or empirical standards of exactitude and knowledge, while an equally strong desire to distinguish between interpretation as artistic appreciation (still practised in literature classes) and textual analysis proper has

led scholars to look to formalist methods and linguistic models. Old film history, conceived as a history of films following each other in orderly progression or of film-makers passing on the torch of innovation, found itself opposed by a new theory of history, but also by a new theory of films. Their tactical alliance brought about New Film History, which should really be called New History of the Cinema.

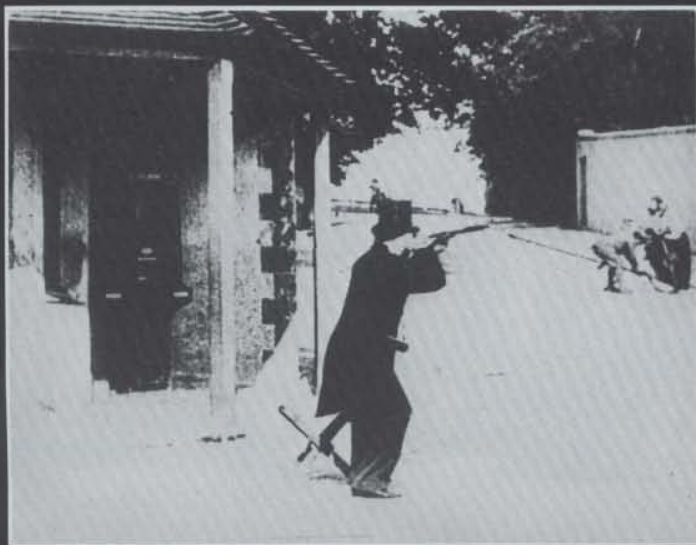
*More than a history
of films...*

Allen and Gomery's plea to look not merely at films has to be seen less in the light of the discovery of new facts than of the relevance of evidence disregarded by traditional film histories: business papers, court records, city ordinances and fire regulations, urban transport policy and demographic data of all kinds.

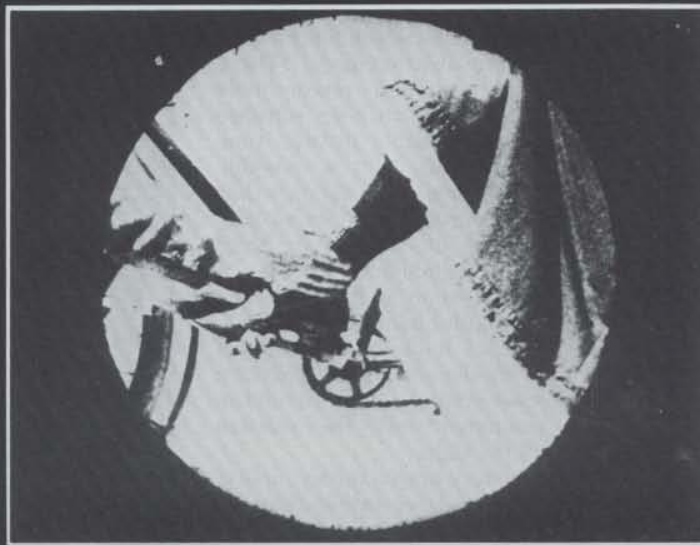
The cinema is a complex historical, sociological, legal and economic phenomenon: films are merely one manifestation of the working of the system as a whole, and it is the system which fascinates them. They have a voracious appetite for the minutiae of company files, a nose for such seemingly trivial aspects of the movie experience as popcorn franchises and air-conditioning. Who would have thought that the problems of Chicago meatpackers might have influenced the development of the cinema's picture palaces? Attention to detail, informed by a grasp of wider implications, made Allen and Gomery's work truly illuminating when it began appearing around 1976. They dispelled widely held misconceptions about specific issues (Allen's veritable campaign against the so-called 'chaser' theory of early films in vaudeville theatres; Gomery's contention that Warner Brothers didn't just gamble on sound because the company was faced with bankruptcy). They proved—to the greatest possible satisfaction of anyone

Stills from Barry Salt's book, which relates technology to style.

Below: the first shot of G. A. Smith's *As Seen Through a Telescope* (1901): a man watches another man helping a woman on to a bicycle.



The second shot of the film: a point of view shot simulating the view through the telescope with a circular black vignette mask.



ever moved by Hegelian notions of totality and synthesis—that in the cinema everything connects. 'Film is an open system . . . The artistic effects that can be achieved in the cinema at any given time are in part dependent on the state of film technology. Technological developments are conditioned in many instances by economic factors. Economic decision-making occurs within a social context, and so forth. Furthermore, historically, film can never be separated from other systems: the popular entertainment industry, other means of mass communication, national economies, or other art forms.'

To do film history today, one has to become an economic historian, a legal expert, a sociologist, an architectural historian, know about censorship and fiscal policy, read trade papers and fan magazines, even study Lloyds Lists of ships sunk during World War One to calculate how much of the film footage exported to Europe actually reached its destination. The takeover of the old studios by multinational conglomerates in the 1960s and 70s meant that huge stocks of company files were dumped on or donated to university libraries. One can now begin to write film history from both ends: from the top (David O. Selznick's memos, an MGM script conference, the entire United Artists company records), but also from the bottom upwards (the Balaban and Katz theatre chain, real estate values and the siting of local cinemas, the drive-in economy). Film scholars are beginning to apply to the audio-visual culture of our century the sort of micro-history that the 'Annalist School' in France developed for medieval popular culture.

Some of this spirit of discovery still breathes through the pages of *Film History*, but the textbook format and the need to cover all aspects tend to neutralise in the presentation what the argument is at pains to stress, 'that the force or causal power of generative mechanisms is uneven in any particular historical event.' Which I take to mean that in history one can rarely quantify by any statistically reliable method, but has to remain as specific as possible and always attend to the actual dynamics of local phenomena. The authors' reasonable but non-committal pluralism is finally less satisfying than their own earlier investigations, which felt no need to conform to any abstract model. 'There are more than enough researchable topics in film history to keep scholars busy for the foreseeable future,' they persuasively suggest. But a possible sense of unease comes from the fact that they only intermittently reflect on why they study film at all, rather than turning their formidable powers of analysis to the motor industry or the tobacco trade. Film history's danger as a discipline is that it becomes a kind of intellectual challenge, whose pleasure lies in the ever greater complexity of the method, compared with the relative simplicity of the data.

Does film history need a theory, or is it ultimately a descriptive rather than an

analytical exercise, rearranging certain data in terms of their functioning and developing material for an interminable graduate research project? Allen and Gomery are weakest when they try to spell out the totality; strongest where they merely suggest it by attending to the specific.

Can technology explain style?

Can technology explain style? This is the question Barry Salt tries to answer. In the forthright manner of the first five chapters of *Film Style and Technology: History and Analysis*, he might have voiced some of these objections to the New Film History's apparent indifference to 'actual films'. On the other hand, Salt would be the first to agree that, given the conflicting interpretations habitually produced by film critics, 'the response of anyone with any scientific inclination or training is to use some extra system of real knowledge to determine relative pertinence and validity of these different interpretations.' Which is itself a fair description of how Allen and Gomery would tackle the problem.

Salt's life work has been to build up the elements for a comparative history of film styles. For instance, directorial style analysis, he argues, has rarely gone beyond saying that Howard Hawks keeps his camera at eye level. Salt offers a 'commonsense' or functional explanation: it allows for faster work, because it requires fewer changes to the lighting set-up. But Henry Hathaway, too, keeps the camera at eye level. 'The real stylistic distinction' is that 'Hawks keeps his Average Shot Length a little longer than normal, whereas Hathaway uses faster cutting.'

Salt's main qualification as a historian is a truly encyclopedic knowledge of films. He has, by his own claims, logged in detail not hundreds but thousands of

features. He has an exhaustive list of what camera, what lighting equipment or film stock was used for the first time where, in what film and by whom. He has made it his business to ascertain when film-makers first used 'correct' entrances and exits, 'correct' eyeline matches, when they got their scene-dissection 'right'. Salt constructs the history of the cinema backwards, from the point of perfection of what he calls 'continuity cinema', but he is very much aware that the first application of a technique does not necessarily establish its general use. He might well be reluctant to admit it, but his own examples show that a strictly evolutionary history cannot be written without also accounting for the gaps and discontinuities, and that therefore the cinema involves cultural codes of intelligibility and meaning as well as scientifically established norms.

For each period, Salt isolates what seem to him the most telling criteria by which the norm can be tested and deviation assessed. So, for 1900-06 it is relation of close-up to general shot, the function of inserts, different ways of handling shot transitions and first examples of analytical editing. For the early 1910s he concentrates on composition and staging in depth. His research on set design, on the use of studio interiors and exteriors, on matte work and trick photography is equally impressive, because he covers both the United States and Europe. His engrossing knowledge of equipment means that his 'stylistic' attention focuses mainly on the technical aspects, but anyone wanting to know how many painted sets there were in the German cinema before *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* can be sure that Salt has found and listed them. The interest of this and other examples is that there were few real 'firsts' in the cinema: most so-called inventions of technique resulted from a series of diverse and more or less successful applications, often in films no longer remembered. If crediting certain films

In the beginning: *La Sortie des Usines Lumière à Lyons* (1895).



and film-makers (such as Griffith) with 'firsts' is a typical sign of the old film history, Salt is very much a representative of the new school: non-biased samples, criteria of relevance that are verifiable, quantifiable and constant throughout.

Where Salt is in a class of his own is in his patented invention, statistical style analysis, the centrepiece of which is the ASL (Average Shot Length), a unit of cutting rate that Salt has tabulated in hundreds of films to pin down a director's personality ('Where does [Sternberg's heart] beat? In the centre of the frame. How does it beat? Slowly. Is this just rhetorical hyperbole? No, I will explain'), or to measure the difference between American and German films (Germans use longer takes) or to plot changes from one decade to the next (the ASL, bar-charted at around nine seconds for the 1930s, shows a far shallower graph for the period 1946-51). Other pertinent statistics for Salt's purposes are shot scale, reverse angle (not to be confused with point-of-view shots) and, finally, camera movements.

'In search of variables that might characterise films,' Salt thus takes up, rather surprisingly, much the same stylistic features that Andrew Sarris, auteurism's American high priest, had first seized on. They in turn are not so dissimilar from the criteria that Salt's *bête noire*, Raymond Bellour, used in his analysis of a sequence from Hitchcock's *The Birds*. The difference is all in the application. Where Sarris or Victor Perkins would interpret editing style or camera movements expressively in relation to 'theme', and Bellour described the functioning of a film by organising its stylistic figures in pairs (static shot/moving shot; close shot/medium shot; seeing/seen) in order to define the building blocks of an internally coherent system, Salt's method is objective to the point of madness: although he gives us all the data, only he holds the keys to its ultimate significance. There are hints that eventually (when more work has

been done) one will be able to correlate, say, the percentage of camera movements with the ASL figure in a director's work, to arrive at a grid of mean average norms for a country or period or genre. For the moment, however, the play of similarity and difference that Salt pursues with such dedication reads like a structuralist's nightmare.

Salt's work may be seen as a technological history of the cinema: it is difficult to verify, since he is so very sparing with his sources. The ambition, though, clearly goes beyond providing a mere handbook of cameras, lenses, moviolas and sound equipment, with examples of stylistic effects resulting from their use. Because *Film Style and Technology* is wholly production-oriented (director, cameraman, art director, sound engineer are the agents of change through intention, originality and influence), there is, however, a danger of mistaking technology for technique, as though a film-maker were simply handed the tools, to select the ones most useful for the job, or as if technology, constantly evolving towards some ultimate goal, merely had to be plucked like ripe fruit from the tree of knowledge. And although Salt does not tell the old adventure story of wizards, inventors and geniuses, he seems quite uninterested in how far the stylistic norms he describes are dependent on the industry's ability to standardise the required technology or to regulate its use. Nor does he tell us what pressures brought about the technology in the first place.

The New History has an easy time proving that inventions are rarely a matter of individuals, and that commercial application and exploitation is a complex process. For Allen and Gomery, there is some truth in the assertion that 'the state of technology at any given moment imposes certain limits on film production.' But would a historian not have to ask: limits in respect to what? Total self-expression? Total realism? Total illusionism? Further, what factors

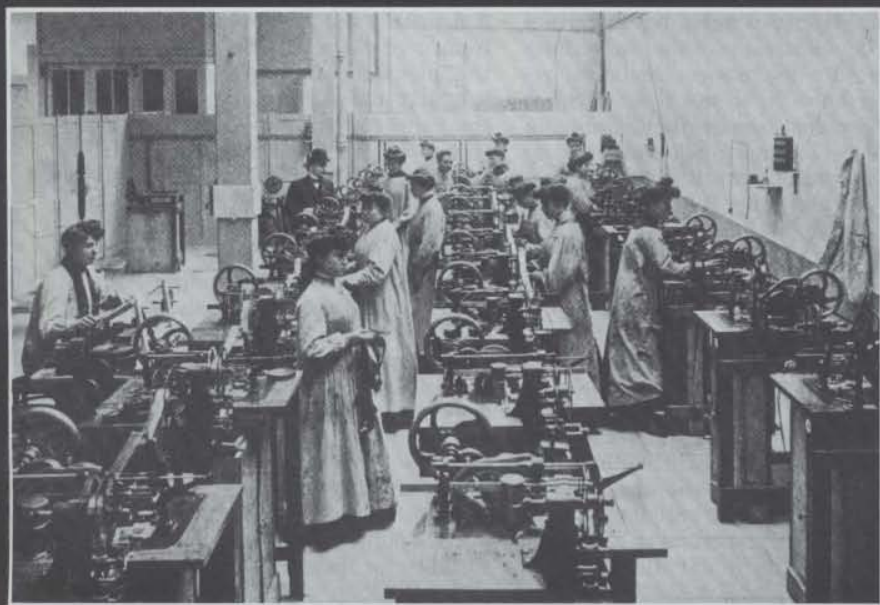
or forces hinder technology in its relentless forward thrust? Missing from the idea of the cinema as technology-intostyle, as exemplified by Salt, is above all a sense of the economic conditions through which technology develops in a capitalist society. It has been clear for some time, for instance, that Edison, who inspired so much of the mythology of the inventor genius, contributed little to developing the cinema but much to controlling the patents necessary for its exploitation. As the leading figure behind the Motion Picture Trust, he could be said to be the father not of cinema, but of the monopolistic practices typical of the film industry. Technology in application is bounded on the one side by economic considerations (how costly is it to introduce and how profitable to apply?) and on the other by questions of what resistance it encounters, and from whom.

Can economics explain technology?

Gomery's articles, two of which are reprinted in *Film Sound*, developed his general argument out of specific researches into the history of the coming of sound. Within the overall logic of capitalism, the balance between the different variables involved in technological innovation is struck by a single objective, the 'long term maximisation of profits.' Gomery is able to show that because sound films were an immediate success, all other problems—improvement to the equipment, cost of installation, training personnel, refurbishing production facilities and exhibition outlets—were overcome in record time. Yet although the hero of his narrative is neither Edison or De Forest, nor even the brothers Warner, there is a central character: Waddill Catchings, Warner Brothers' business manager and financial adviser. Are we back to a great man theory?

If we take maximisation of profits as the underlying dynamic of technological change, we have not explained very much. Edward Buscombe once argued that there were many different ways for a capitalist enterprise to make money, and therefore innovations like sound and colour could not be derived simply from the profit (or supply and demand) motive. Given the monopolistic organisation of the film industry, certain competitive strategies, like price cuts or increasing market share, are usually not available to the producer. The only competitive advantage is enjoyed by those who create a new kind of product. Sound film in this perspective was precisely that: a new kind of product. The implication is that the pursuit of profit always requires a weighing of different factors to attain the same goal, and Gomery's emphasis on business management in his account of Warner Brothers means that, however plural his model purports to be, it is framed within the

A little later: women workers in the Pathecolor print room.



terms of perhaps too narrow an economic determinism.

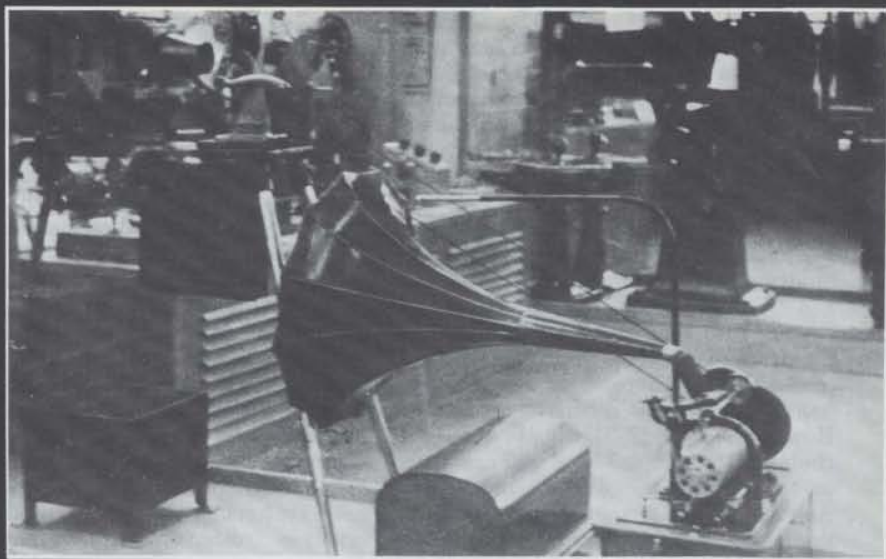
If the economist's approach of Allen and Gomery gives no active role to social forces or to the films themselves, and if the stylistics of Salt leave no room for economic determinants, could any form of history explain why change took one direction rather than another, or why audiences were attracted to the cinema at all, to make it such a powerful entertainment medium?

A certain line of inquiry, usually associated with Jean-Louis Comolli, proceeded from the assumption that we owe the existence of the cinema to two mutually reinforcing social demands: 'to see life as it is' combining with the desire to make this a source of profit. An ideological priority joins an economic one, and it is the interplay between the two that regulates both the technological and the stylistic developments. Yet during the relatively short history of the cinema, what strikes the observer is also the slowness of change.

For instance, it is now accepted that as a universally intelligible system of visual representation, mainstream cinema has not changed since roughly 1917. The addition of sound and colour had little effect on the 'basic cinematic apparatus'. Rick Altman and Mary Anne Doane make the point forcefully in *Film Sound*, showing how inaudible sound editing paralleled invisible image editing. In an article on 'Colour and Cinema', Edward Branigan had similarly argued that colour related to deep focus, which in turn depended on coated lens technology. Resistance to change is therefore just as important and just as much in need of explanation. Historians such as Allen and Gomery conclude from this that the cinema, instead of responding to some ideological demand such as the perfection of realism, actually functions according to the checks and balances of self-regulation, whether on the economic level or as a story-telling medium. Such notions as the maintenance of stability between different elements are themselves historically determined.

Can the audience explain the cinema?

These potentially 'structuralist' tendencies among the New Historians are echoed in the pessimism of another French theorist, Jean-Louis Baudry, whose influence (along with that of Christian Metz and Comolli) gives *Cinema and Technology: Image, Sound, Colour* what might be called an anthropological slant. Starting essentially from the space film viewing creates for the spectator—placed between screen and projector, light source and image, seeing but not being seen—Baudry conceives of the cinema first and foremost as a certain type of experience, in one sense as old as Plato's parable of the cave, in another typically modern, because representing an unmediated collision



Edison's first sound apparatus.

between technology and non-productive, regressive fantasy. The cinema's history, its implicit goal, is determined not by a striving after realism, not by narrative (which is simply its motivating support), nor even illusionism and the magic of effects without cause, but the always already realised duplication of life, a mirroring of the self, and with it an anticipation of the self's own disappearance.

To provide a kind of anthology of the cinema's involvement with 'vision, life, reality, movement—and death' seems to have been one of the less overt objectives of *Cinema and Technology*. Steve Neale has divided his subject into three chapters—*Image, Sound, Colour*—and in each he discusses a complex of questions, ranging from a rehearsal of names and dates to metaphysical speculation. 'Over and above the technology, on the one hand, and the films themselves, on the other, what was important, with the move towards cinema projection and the elaboration of the relation between spectator, projector and screen, was the experience of cinema, and the institutionalisation of that experience across society.'

Much of what Neale has to say is, in the best as well as the worst sense, technical: clear as writing, but uncertain whom it addresses. One sometimes wonders why the novice should be required to know in so much detail what for the specialist is presented in quite an elementary manner. Like Allen and Gomery, Neale wants to impress upon his readers the materiality and heterogeneous elements that make up the cinematic apparatus. Like Salt, he is fascinated by the intricacy of the machines themselves. But among the collage of illustrations and quotations, the upbeat technological story and the downbeat philosophical reflections perform a rather delicate balancing act. The thesis I take to be this: that the developments of the cinema towards illusionist substitution and duplication necessarily involve an ever greater predominance of the technological aspect over the craft and bricoleur spirit of the cinema's

origins, which in turn demands an ever more complex organisation of the industrial base.

The sound that exists in the mind.

Nothing could be further from the minds of the editors of *Film Sound Theory and Practice* than global pessimism. This anthology convincingly suggests that an exciting new field has been opened up, one that may well come to determine the way we look at the cinema as a whole—and this for precise historical reasons. Sound for a long time has been the neglected field of film studies, for reasons Rick Altman explains in his 'Evolution of Sound Technology'. Because writers treated first the image and then sound, they committed the 'historical fallacy'. 'Instead of treating sound and image as simultaneous and co-existent, the historical fallacy orders them chronologically, thus implicitly hierarchising them.'

Altman's essay deserves special mention, as a bold and original recasting of many traditional questions. He makes it clear that the turn to sound also comes from a problem in film theory, namely the unsatisfactory explanations of what it is that makes the cinema attractive to the viewer in the first place. Without a theory of pleasure—and the possibility that this may have changed its nature over time—it is difficult to see how one could write a history of the cinema. The traditional explanation has always been the public's craving for realism; but on closer inspection, as we saw, this is at variance with the facts. Sound films were popular not because they were particularly realistic, but because one could see and hear at the same time. The attraction lay in the additional source of sense perception—as it did with colour, which at first was felt to be highly unrealistic.

The notion that colour was more suitable for fantasy subjects persisted



Laying the soundtrack for *Apocalypse Now*. Stills from *Cinema and Technology*.

well into the 1940s; it was only the advent of colour television that eventually 'naturalised' its use in the cinema. With television having the edge on realism, the movies have returned, especially since the reorganisation of the industry in the 1970s, to the controlled environment of the studios and the sound stages. Rather than effacing itself, technology in the form of special effects has become the cinema's major attraction.

History, in this respect, has come full circle: the cinema first wooed patrons with the novelty of its technological marvels, before stars and story-telling became its chief selling points. The position taken by historians such as David Bordwell is that technology or technique cannot be isolated from other processes, chief among them being the development of narrative. Barry Salt would not quarrel with this, since for him the 'job' of movies is 'putting across the story'. Yet even if one replaces the idea of realism-as-pleasure with that of narrative-as-pleasure, the question does not quite resolve itself. Few historians fully address the question of why narrative became the driving force of cinema, and whether this may itself be subject to change. Today, the success of science fiction as a genre, or of directors like Steven Spielberg whose narratives are simply anthology pieces from basic movie plots, suggests that narrative has to some extent become an excuse for the pyrotechnics of Industrial Light and Magic.

The material gathered in *Film Sound* affords a good opportunity to compare the state-of-theory on sound (represented by Altman, Mary Anne Doane, Alan Williams) not only with its economic history but with current practice and the attitudes of sound engineers to their craft. What is most instructive is to see how, under a certain angle, the theoretical and practical discourses mirror each other.

Altman and Doane (and, from a related perspective, the contributions of Noël Burch, Noel Carroll and Alan Williams) underline the discontinuity between

sound and image, their wholly constructed nature, and the tendencies of classical sound practice to efface that sound/image separation. The difference between a 'structural' (Burch's term), 'contrapuntal' (Lucy Fischer's analysis of Vertov), 'silent' use of sound (Carroll's description for Fritz Lang's *M*) and the 'illusionist' practice typical of commercial feature films, has often served to distinguish European film-makers (Clair, Renoir) from Hollywood, and politically avant-garde directors (Straub, Godard) from 'bourgeois ideology'.

Hollywood practice depends on strict synchronisation. The spectator's pleasure in classical narrative film demands not only being 'centred' by the image and the story, but that the aural space should have 'presence'. Technology, however, creates a 'fantasmatic body, which offers a support as well as a point of identification for the subject addressed by the film' (Doane). Precisely because sound is fundamentally disembodied and illusionist, in the sense that its source is only by convention recognised as located in the image, anti-illusionist directors tend to foreground the integrity of their soundtrack. Jean-Marie Straub's total rejection of dubbing implies that aural space dominates visual space. Jean-Luc Godard, by contrast, recognises no hierarchies: he multiplies sound sources within a single image; he makes the spectator both viewer *and* listener, and no attempt is made to unify the two.

Yet as Altman (Rick, discussing Robert) points out, sound practice is a challenge to film theorists, because contemporary film-making at the industrial level is moving rather in the direction of giving sound precedence over the image. Avant-garde positions, such as that of Noël Burch, are being outflanked by commercial directors who take their cue from the technology and techniques of the record business. Developments in recording are concerned with what Altman calls 'the splitting of the subject'—that is to say, giving the ear the thrills of divided pleasure, of sound densities and sound perspectives which, if translated into images, would not only be

extremely avant-garde to the eye but positively threatening to that sense of coherence which is assumed to govern Hollywood ideology. One of the contributors to *Film Sound* speaks of a 'Second Sound Revolution' and quotes Michael Cimino, for whom Dolby sound 'can demolish the wall separating the viewer from the film. You can come close to demolishing the screen.' The goal, however, seems to be the creation of a sound space that is entirely in the listener's head. Walter Murch, 'sound designer' on *Apocalypse Now*: 'You try to get the audience to a point, somehow, where they can imagine the sound. They hear the sound in their minds, and it really isn't on the track at all. That's the ideal sound, the one that exists totally in the mind.'

If special effects work, where the image is composed and layered in analogy to the soundtrack of an LP, is to become the model of film-making, this can only intensify the 'imaginary' status of the cinema and its form of representation. And if sound as a system of subject effects is to determine the logic of the image, then one can expect to see changes in the relation of cinema to narrative as well, and some of the objectives that have inspired the New Film History may have to be revised. Economic and technological histories have shifted the emphasis from text to context. But a study of sound in relation to image would mean a return to the film text and the imaginary space in which it places the spectator. For film theory has long recognised that one of the major sources of audience pleasure is the splitting of the subject in representation. This becomes more evident once film texts are no longer unified by narrative but by the effects technology can produce, and the divisions and multiplications it imposes on sound and image.

It is at this point that what I have described as the history of the cinema might reconcile itself with the concerns of film theory. And the new history stands back to back with television, of which it is beginning to look like the pre-history: the predominance of economic factors, or the direct impact of technology and institutional constraints on narrative, are even more significant for television than for cinema. And at the same time television, in spite of appearing to be all about the 'outside', the real world, is, like sound, happening 'inside'. The individual TV slot or programme becomes almost impossible to analyse in isolation, except as a system of cues and stimuli for the distracted viewer/listener.

What in this respect is missing from Allen and Gomery, from Salt and Neale, is a more direct awareness of the historical changes underlying their own perspective: none of these books, except *Film Sound*, pays attention to the new technologies as they affect not only the cinema but how we come to view its history. The New History, depending on the one hand on archivists and restorers and on the other on video and television, may well be the phoenix that rises from the ashes of the cinema we once knew. ■

This extract from
JOHN HOUSEMAN's
memoir *Unfinished Business*
(Chatto and Windus)

begins in 1946, with his
return to Hollywood after staging the
Mary Martin-Yul Brynner musical
Lute Song on Broadway.
Unfinished Business
is a stylishly condensed
single volume edition of Houseman's
three-volume autobiography written
during the 1970s, of which only the
first part, *Run-Through*, has
previously been published in Britain
(Allen Lane, 1973).



Nicholas Ray and John Houseman.

HOUSEMAN, RAY

A few days after the opening of *Lute Song* I started driving back to Los Angeles in the company of two close friends and collaborators—Herman Mankiewicz and Nick Ray. Both were dedicated to their own self-destruction, but their timing was different. Herman was forty-nine; his health was impaired and his wild, reckless days were behind him. It was seven years since we had worked on *Citizen Kane* and he had six years more to live; they were years in which, behind his truculent front, he was worrying about survival and about his health and about the condition in which he would be leaving his family. With *Kane* he had made his statement as a writer and, from now on, he was resigned to making his living as a well-paid studio hack.

Nick Ray, at thirty-five, had worked with me in theatre and radio. Our collaboration in film was about to begin. He was a stimulating and sometimes disturbing companion: garrulous and inarticulate, ingenuous and pretentious, his mind was filled with original ideas which he found difficult to formulate or express. Alcohol reduced him to rambling unintelligibility; his speech, which was slow and convoluted at best, became unbearably turgid after more than one drink. Yet, confronted with a theatrical situation or a problem of dramatic or musical expression, he was amazingly quick, lucid and intuitive with a sureness of touch, a sensitivity to human values and an infallible taste that I have seldom seen equalled.

He was a handsome, complicated man whose sentimentality and apparent soft-

ness covered deep layers of resilience and strength. Reared in Wisconsin in a household dominated by women, he was a potential homosexual with a deep, passionate and constant need for female love in his life. This made him attractive to women, for whom the chance to save him from his own self-destructive habits proved an irresistible attraction of which Nick took full advantage and for which he rarely forgave them. He left a trail of damaged lives behind him—not as a seducer, but as a husband, lover and father.

From his year's apprenticeship as a scholarship student with Frank Lloyd Wright, Nick had acquired a perfectionism and a sense of commitment to his work which were rare in the theatre and even more rare in the film business. But in his personal life he was the victim of irresistible impulses that left his career and his personal relationships in ruins and finally destroyed him.

Once again we crossed the desert at night and arrived in Los Angeles on a grey February morning. The next day I drove down to the studio.

RKO, of which Bill Dozier had recently become head of production, was a maverick studio with no consistent record of achievement and no discernible policy—artistic or economic. This instability had permitted the production of a number of notable films over the years, including the early Hepburns, *King Kong*, the first Astaire musicals, *Citizen Kane* and, more recently, Val Lewton's small masterpieces of terror from *Cat People* to *The Isle of the Dead*.

I spent my first two months reading

material and resisting most of Dozier's suggestions for films. Then, from among the piles of galleys, synopses and type-scripts with which I was deluged, I came across a short novel—*Thieves Like Us*—by an unknown writer about which I decided, before I was halfway through it, that this was my next film. It was a blend of chase and love story—the brief idyll of two lonely, emotionally stunted young people set in a world in which hunger, fear, treachery and violence were essential components. I gave it to Nick to read and he liked it as much as I did. Dozier was less enthusiastic but agreed to buy it for me. He suggested several highly paid Hollywood writers for the screenplay. I told him I'd rather work on it quietly with Nick Ray.

I rented a house high in the Hollywood Hills whose previous tenant had been Peter Lorre. It had an amazing view of the city and a small guest house at the end of the garden. Here Nick was installed and started work on the treatment of *Thieves Like Us* that formed the basis of the film we made the following year. While I spent the day at the studio reading the scripts that Dozier kept sending me, Nick was up on the hill working like a man possessed. In the evening and early morning we'd go over what he'd done during the day. And we worked weekends. For by now I was convinced that we were on to something I had been waiting and hoping for ever since my arrival in Hollywood—a film I really loved.

We were making slow but satisfying progress when I learned one morning (from the trades) that RKO had been sold



Max Ophüls and Joan Fontaine.

& OPHÜLS

and Bill Dozier liquidated. As usual in show business, all projects initiated by the previous management were automatically cancelled or shelved. I managed to keep Nick on the payroll for a few weeks; we finished the treatment, had it mimeographed—all 124 pages of it—and stole a dozen copies for future use.

The change of management did not affect my own contract, which had two and a half years to run. But, if I was not going to make a film, I preferred to wait for the next phase of my contract back in New York. This allowed me to consider an offer I had received the previous winter.

A former fellow worker on the WPA Negro Theater, one Perry Watkins (the only black set-designer working in the New York theatre), had come to me with a project, still in the dream stage, involving Duke Ellington and John Latouche. Their idea was to update Gay's *Beggar's Opera*, to move its milieu from London's eighteenth century underworld to the contemporary jungle of our own big cities. (The Brecht-Weill *Threepenny Opera* was still virtually unknown since its failure on Broadway in the mid-thirties.) It was an attractive idea—all the more since this promised to be a wholly integrated production, beginning with the authors and producers and going right on down through the cast and chorus.

All through the spring and summer of 1946, Perry Watkins would call long distance every few weeks to report that all was going well—'full steam ahead' was his phrase; money was pouring in

and Latouche and Ellington were 'cooking with gas'. Still no script arrived. After the collapse of our film plans, Nick and I made another of our high-pressure drives to New York to appraise the situation.

The day after we arrived, I drove over the George Washington Bridge to New City to take a look at the House on the Hill that Henry Poor was building for me. It was mid-afternoon, and the hills above the South Mountain Road were bright with leaves—the lush, heavy green of Hudson Valley summer. I couldn't see my house from below, but a road of sorts had been torn out of the side of the hill, with a huge, curved retaining wall of native stone to keep it from sliding into the ravine. The leaves were still dripping from a summer storm as I came up around the last steep curve with my tyres skidding in the wet gravel. And suddenly there it was—rising like a ruined castle out of the rock and the scarred earth, its great fieldstone walls pierced with black, gaping windows that stared out over the trees and the valley below. It was Sunday and there was no one at work; there was no roof yet or doors or window frames; tree stumps and builders' equipment were scattered around under the grey stormclouds; it all had a grim, abandoned look and my first emotion on seeing my dream house was not the excitement and pleasure I had expected but a sudden, overwhelming desire to see it sink and vanish forever into the earth.

Until this instant it had been a remote and vaguely imagined thing, born of a sentimental fantasy and nurtured by

what was left over each month of my Hollywood earnings. Now, in one awful moment, the conceit had become a reality. Half-finished and empty, it filled me with foreboding and gloom—a terrifying symbol of the perpetual, insoluble conflict between my growing need to belong somewhere and my old, deadly, fear of engagement...

The following day Nick and I met the producers of *Beggar's Holiday* and were made aware of several things—none of them good. Latouche had written a number of lyrics but only the roughest draft of our first act and almost nothing of the second. Ellington, teeming with tunes and mood pieces, still had not faced the necessity of composing a musical score. Added to these unpleasant discoveries were others of which I soon became aware: our producers were not only inexperienced and inefficient—they were desperately short of money. Finally, owing to the Duke's enormous list of future commitments, we had no leeway at all but must start rehearsals within four weeks or not at all. We decided to go ahead.

We spent our days planning the production, our nights in a desolate, freezing penthouse on the roof of the Chelsea Hotel, slaving away at the script, trying to give it some shape and motion. A week before rehearsal we had the semblance of a first act: it remained fairly close to Gay's original text, ending with MacHeath's betrayal by Jenny Diver. The second act was chaotic and remained so.

Our integrated show gave us opportunities for adventurous and exhilarating casting. MacHeath was played by Alfred Drake; the Lockits were black; the Peachums were white, with Zero Mostel in his first stage role as the outrageous Mr Peachum. The pimps and whores were mixed black and white with Avon Long as Filch and Libby Holman as a sultry, overripe Jenny Diver. The settings, originally attempted by Perry Watkins, were soon, at my insistence, turned over to Oliver Smith, who, in less than a week, delivered designs of such imaginative beauty that he repeated most of them years later (fire escapes and all) in *West Side Story*.

Rehearsals began deceptively well, but by the middle of the second week we found ourselves mired in our non-existent second act, and our producer's cheques had begun to bounce. Costume and scene shops were threatening to suspend fittings and building for lack of funds when a new angel was unearthed in the person of a small, ill-favoured, timid alcoholic who, in a series of desperate scenes of blackmail and tears, was separated over the next few weeks from a substantial part of his inherited wealth. Unfortunately, the money never seemed to arrive in time to re-establish our credit or to assure the smooth progress of the production.

The nightmare continued—growing darker and more frightening from day to day. New Haven, that familiar testing ground for unready and faltering

productions, saw us arrive on a Monday and rehearse for two days on a bare stage because the scenic studio where our show was being built refused to load out the scenery until it was paid for. We were due to open on Thursday night under our new name of *Twilight Alley*. At noon, eight hours before opening, we began our first and only dress rehearsal, which we were unable to complete.

Even in a town that was used to impromptu openings, ours was unusually calamitous. The last twenty minutes of the show—MacHeath's death dream in the electric chair followed by his reprieve and his reunion with his many wives—were virtually improvised by Drake and the cast before an audience that included the usual number of vulturous ill-wishers from New York.

In the frenetic atmosphere that prevailed, it was never entirely clear to me whether I resigned from *Beggar's Holiday* or was fired. I do remember that on the morning following our New Haven opening I informed the producers that I was leaving the show. They made no attempt to dissuade me and I later discovered that they had already hired George Abbott to try to salvage their project. It didn't help. *Beggar's Holiday* limped into New York and closed after a few weeks. What should have been a triumphal theatrical novelty had been ruined by inadequate preparation and inept production. I have always felt that much of the responsibility for the disaster was mine—for agreeing to go into rehearsal with a show that was nowhere near ready.

Soon after that, while I was nursing my wounds, I received a phone call from Herman Mankiewicz in California informing me that Dore Schary had just been named head of production for RKO. I had never worked with him, but I knew him as an educated, intelligent, progressive film-maker. I told my agents that I was ready to resume my RKO contract and asked them to notify Schary to that effect. He sent word within a few days that I could start any time I wished. I called to thank him and to ask him, please, to read the treatment of *Thieves Like Us* as soon as possible. A week later I was back in Los Angeles.

“From the first instant of shooting, Nick Ray emerged as an autonomous creator with a style and work patterns . . . entirely and fiercely his own.”

In nine months I produced two films and presented five West Coast theatrical premières—not to mention the opening of a new playhouse, the creation of a gallery of modern art, the formation of the Hollywood Film Society and the publication of the *Hollywood Quarterly*. Most of these activities took place simultaneously—sometimes parallel, sometimes overlapping—and they were all, as



They Live by Night: a bare field northeast of Los Angeles.

usual, unpremeditated and unexpected. It started with *Thieves Like Us*. By the time Nick Ray and I got back to California, Dore Schary had read our treatment and liked it. After five months of torpor following Dozier's departure, the studio was in need of product and Schary was eager to go into production as soon as possible.

The first step was to turn Nick's 124-page treatment into a screenplay. It was, in fact, half screenplay already, with the action, the characters and much of the dialogue of the film we eventually made. What we needed now was a writer of sufficient skill and experience to turn out a script that would be budgeted and shot within the limitations of a medium-priced picture. He must also have the sensitivity and modesty to recognise and respect the quality we had found in the book and that Nick had developed in his treatment.

Nick was eager to write the screenplay himself but I had other plans for him. And I had the writer I needed. Charles Schnee was a friend from New York, a one-time contributor to the Mercury Theater whose recent work on Howard Hawks' *Red River* made him an accredited film writer. He liked *Thieves Like Us* and agreed to work on it. He was a fast writer and within six weeks, working closely with Nick and myself, he had completed a screenplay that was approved by Schary and the production department. One element was still missing—the director.

Several well-known names were suggested. But, this time, I was determined to have my own way and my own director. For the first time since I had begun to make pictures I felt myself wholly committed to a film and that commitment included Nick Ray. I had a problem selling him to the Studio: his aesthetic and moral ruminations made him suspect to the tough, pragmatic men in the production department. Schary was sympathetic, but he had natural

reservations about entrusting a feature film to a novice whose only experience was the three months he had spent as Kazan's assistant on *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*. To solve the argument, I persuaded Schary to let Ray direct our casting tests. They were beautiful and, within a week, Nicholas Ray was formally installed as director of *Thieves Like Us* with a starting date that was less than two months away.

At the Voice of America and during the making of *Tuesday in November*, *Lute Song* and *Beggar's Holiday*, my cooperation with Nick had been a close and affectionate one. This continued throughout the preparation of our film. Then, with the first day's shooting of *Thieves Like Us*, I realised that our association had undergone a subtle but drastic change. Our affection continued throughout its making and for another thirty years. But, suddenly, there was a new balance. Until then, though I had complete faith in his taste and talent and frequently accepted his judgments, Nick had functioned as my assistant. Overnight this was changed. From the first instant of shooting, Nick Ray emerged as an autonomous creator with a style and work patterns that were entirely and fiercely his own. As with Orson in our early days together, it now became my function to maintain a climate within which he could work freely and creatively, without interference from anyone—including myself.

Our first day's shooting was traumatic. We had agreed to make *Thieves Like Us* as much in sequence as possible. Our first shot was an open field in which four escaping convicts and the terrified farmer they have taken hostage are racing in his battered open Model A towards the highway and freedom. Nick wanted to shoot the scene from above, and since no camera crane was high enough or capable of travelling at high speed over rough corn stubble, he decided it must be shot from a helicopter.



They Live by Night: Howard Da Silva, Farley Granger.

Whirlybirds had been used for combat filming during the war and for high-panoramic shots of landscapes and cities but never, to my knowledge, the way Ray was planning to use this one—as an infinite, swiftly moving boom. Ours was not a ‘big’ picture and the production department predictably opposed the idea on the grounds that it involved serious risks. Nick was adamant: he insisted it was an essential shot—a unique way to establish the mood and movement of the film in its opening moments. I agreed to let him try.

The next morning we stood in a bare field northeast of Los Angeles, waiting for the mist to clear. A little after nine the pilot announced he was ready to take off. Nick went up in the cameraman’s place. For more than an hour our battered Model A bounced over the corn stubble while the whirlybird clattered overhead. Once it almost hit a sandbank with its tailpiece. Finally, with the fourth run, the shape of the shot became clear, and Nick got out and let the operator climb back. The helicopter took off, rose and hovered noisily 100 feet above us as the Model A started off again across the field with its four sweating and desperate occupants. As it approached, the helicopter slowly descended to meet it, drawing closer and closer till they were only a few feet apart. For a few seconds, as they travelled along together, the camera held the car in close focus—close enough to catch the wind in the men’s hair and the wild look in their eyes. Then slowly the car started to pull away. The camera was above them now, shooting on the men’s backs except when they glanced back to see if they were being followed, moving along slightly above and behind them as they bumped across the stubble towards the highway. When they reached it, the helicopter rose and hovered and the Model A passed under it, becoming smaller and smaller as it raced away along the highway to safety.

The first take was a dud. Over the walkie-talkie the pilot announced he was coming down and, as soon as he’d landed, everyone came running and gathered clear of the slowly revolving blades for a conference. The operator said he needed more time to change his focus as the car passed beneath him. The car went back to its starting mark as the helicopter blades began to turn. This time, as it rose, it barely avoided a scrub oak. It was a few minutes before noon and it was getting hot. Once again the helicopter hovered noisily overhead. The assistant gave the cue and the Model A bounced past us, gathering speed as the camera came down to meet it. This time it worked. The operator reported a perfect take all the way. For protection Nick made two more—neither as good as the first—then broke for lunch.

By now Nick was drunk with power. The whirlybird was ours for the day and, before nightfall, he had shot fifteen more set-ups including one very dramatic shot of a roadside poster, starting with a huge, garish close-up of a girl advertising a local motel, then pulling back to reveal the small human figure crouched at its base, waiting for night to fall.

We returned to the studio exhausted and triumphant, but it was not until the next day at noon when the ‘dailies’ were rushed over from the lab that we were able to see what had been accomplished. If we had got nothing else, that first sensational shot alone justified Nick’s use of the helicopter to reveal our three principal characters in violent action and to give that feeling of desperate, dusty flight that was to become the continuing style of the picture. And because of the way it was shot from above, it had a curiously detached, almost godlike point of view that could have been achieved in no other way.

Nick maintained his tempo and, after a few days, even the production department came round. He was working with actors now—mostly with the Boy and

the Girl. And as we started to cut and assemble our first few days’ footage we became aware of a very special quality not only in our actors’ performances but also of the physical and emotional background against which their scenes were played. Most of *Thieves Like Us* was shot on our own backlot or on locations that were within easy reach of the studio. And here Nick’s personal experience of hard times in the Southwest, combined with his visual sense, enabled him, with very limited means, to re-create the emotional reality of that world of shabby small towns, abandoned farms and squalid cabins and tourist camps in which the action of our film was taking place. This sense of emotional reality also pervaded the soundtrack that Nick put together with loving care during and after shooting—the characteristic, commonplace, personal and mechanical sounds of American life, blended with a musical score that forms an integral part of the film. Some of it was authentic source material from radios and jukeboxes—pop tunes of the period mixed up with songs by Nick’s friend Woody Guthrie, which were then orchestrated into running themes by Leigh Harline.

“Max informed me . . . that
it was his sombre conclusion
that our ending was
downbeat, maudlin and
wholly lacking in dramatic
conviction.”

Shooting was finished—a day under schedule—and we were editing *Thieves Like Us* when I began to make daily trips over the Cahuenga Pass to the old Universal Studios in the Valley to work on an altogether different project.

The Doziers had re-entered my life. They had set up a producing company of their own of which Dozier was the executive producer and Joan* the star. It was an attractive if slightly incestuous set-up and, for their first independent production, they had chosen Stefan Zweig’s *Letter from an Unknown Woman*, for which I shared their enthusiasm as a vehicle for Joan. I told them I’d be delighted to produce it for them. To write the screenplay we agreed on Howard Koch. He in turn suggested a European émigré, Max Ophüls, as the right director for the picture. To convince us he showed us a film Ophüls had made before the war, based on Schnitzler’s *Liebelei*. We saw it, liked it, invited Ophüls to join us and, almost before I knew it, I was deep in the preparation of a second film.

Bill, as usual, was in a hurry: Joan had a starting date for a film at another studio and we were still working on the screenplay when we went into production. Koch and I were old collaborators and I got on well with Max Ophüls after I overcame his European conviction, aggravated by bad Hollywood

*Joan Fontaine, who had recently married William Dozier.

experiences, that the producer and the director of a film were natural and irreconcilable enemies.

Letter from an Unknown Woman is bittersweet Viennese. It is the confession of a woman who has been in love for most of her life with a man to whom she had meant so little that—though they have been intimate, in different ways, at three different times of their lives—he does not even remember her. The first two-thirds of our story were altogether romantic. They were a joy to work on. Joan Fontaine had proved in *Rebecca*, *Suspicion* and *Jane Eyre* that she was an expert at portraying the emotions of an adolescent girl in thrall to an older man. She had no difficulty at all in playing the teenage Lisa, crouched in the dark stairwell, listening to her idol playing Chopin upstairs in his room. And she was charming and moving as the passionate young Viennese girl giving herself without regret in a romantic ecstasy to the man she has worshipped for most of her life.

The third and last episode presented more serious hazards of writing and acting. The frame of Zweig's novella is a letter written by Lisa as she is dying; it is not a reproach but a profession of gratitude to the man who, without being aware of it, has given her all the love she has ever known. It is a literary device that was valid in print but seemed less convincing when it was transferred to the more specific realism of film. And Joan, with her poignant immaturity, ran into problems of credibility when she was called upon to play a European *femme du monde* in her thirties.

Koch was a sincere writer with a good sense of structure. Vienna was not his territory, but he had Max by his side to guide him and to devise some of the script's most imaginative moments. This was an atmosphere that Ophüls knew

intimately and dearly loved: he used it in *Liebelei* and would use it again, years later, in *La Ronde*. All through production he was tireless and insatiable, to the point of exasperation, in his insistence upon authentic atmospheric detail. Above all I remember that touching, entirely original scene of Lisa's seduction in the mock-up compartment of a European railroad carriage with the painted Alpine scenery moving by outside on a slowly rolling canvas cyclorama propelled by a little man furiously pedalling a stationary bicycle.

Yet, as the film moved into its final stages, I detected a disturbing tone of discouragement and diminishing energy. Some of this had to do with Joan's performance; some was inherent in the form of Zweig's novella, to which Koch had scrupulously—perhaps too scrupulously—adhered. Some of it stemmed from Ophüls' mercurial temperament.

One night, during the last week of shooting, I got a call from him long after midnight. He begged me to drive out and meet him as soon as possible at an all-night joint in the Valley next to the studio. When I got there I found him plunged in raging gloom. We sat for two hours over drinks and coffee, then walked around the back lot, where the dawn was coming up over our Viennese amusement park. Max informed me that he had spent the previous evening running the rough cut of our film and it was his sombre conclusion that our ending was downbeat, maudlin and wholly lacking in dramatic conviction. He blamed Zweig, Koch, Miss Fontaine and, most particularly, himself for our failure. Once in a while he wept, blew his nose and went on talking. There was truth in what he said, all the more since the censors in the Breen Office had taken much of the emotional shock out of Lisa's last moments with her lover. But at five

in the morning, I found his attitude defeatist, self-indulgent and dangerous. I pointed out that it was too late in the day for him to be making these discoveries; that it was impossible, at this stage of the film, to reshape the ending without losing the essential quality of Zweig's story. I assured him that the film was beautiful; I did all I could to send him back on to the set in a less calamitous frame of mind. Three hours later I watched him riding a boom with his usual enthusiasm and that night he called to tell me that our rushes were wonderful.

In the fall of 1947 my future in the film business looked bright. I seemed to have not one winner, but two. While we were preparing and shooting *Letter from an Unknown Woman*, I had continued to work with Nick on the final editing and scoring of *Thieves Like Us*. In September we had two good previews, then cut the negative and began showing it to critics of the trades and magazines under its new title of *Your Red Wagon* (the title of a blues number in the film). Our first reviews were wonderful; Iris Barry gave us a special running at the Museum of Modern Art in New York and word began to get around that we had one of the sleepers of the year.

Then, overnight, disaster struck. Our film was scheduled to be released during the winter of 1947-48. But, before that, the trades carried the dark news one morning that RKO had been acquired by Howard Hughes. His first act was to get rid of Dore Schary and to reverse all arrangements made by the previous management. These included the release of our film, which mouldered in a studio vault for two years before it was released under the title *They Live by Night*. The magazines would not review it a second time or reprint their earlier notices. The daily press treated it as what it had become—a B-picture on the second half of a double bill.

This sabotage of my favourite picture left me with *Letter from an Unknown Woman* as my last hope of establishing my reputation as a serious film-maker. The Doziers seemed happy; our San Francisco preview had gone well and I was beginning to get congratulatory letters from people whose opinions I valued—such as Preston Sturges and Joseph Losey.

My euphoria was short-lived. In the latter part of April, *Letter from an Unknown Woman* was given a hurried national release. It was the year of the Korean War and the national mood was violently anti-romantic. With few exceptions, our reviews were terrible. It took several years of European success to restore *Letter* to its honoured place in the canon of Max Ophüls' film work. In its day, it was an unmitigated disaster—critically and commercially—and a devastating defeat for us all. ■

Extracted from *Unfinished Business* by John Houseman, published by Chatto & Windus on 2 October at £14.95.



Letter from an Unknown Woman: Mady Christians, Joan Fontaine.



The Legend of the Suram Fortress; Simon the Piper.

The Return of Paradjanov

Rejoice and be glad. Sergo Paradjanov, the persecuted, vilified and imprisoned director of *The Colour of Pomegranates*, has resumed his career after fifteen years' enforced idleness. More than that, he has come back from the wilderness with a masterpiece. *The Legend of the Suram Fortress* is so much part of the same world as his last film that it is as if the long silence had never been. Direction is credited not only to Paradjanov, but also to Dodo Abashidze. The helping hand is hard to detect. In all important respects, this looks and feels like a work by the man who made *The Colour of Pomegranates*.

Paradjanov's new film has had a happier history than its predecessor. Shown in 1985 at the Moscow Film Festival, it migrated this year first to Rotterdam, then to Cannes and Pesaro (where it formed the highlight of a full-scale survey of films from the Soviet republics). Overseas distribution seems not to have been a problem, even though the film is in many respects as politically and philosophically ambiguous as *The Colour of Pomegranates*. Professor Herbert Marshall of Southern Illinois University, who has done more than anybody else in the West to campaign for Paradjanov's rehabilitation in the Soviet Union, has a theory about that. He thinks that, in the final analysis, money (and particularly foreign exchange) comes first with the Russian authorities. If a director, however uncomfortable at home to the

powers that be, looks like being a money-spinner overseas, his work will eventually be shown abroad.

The Legend of the Suram Fortress is based on a Georgian legend, and particularly a classic account of it by Daniel Chonkadze. It is dedicated to Georgian warriors of all times who gave up their lives for the Motherland. That, at least, is what the opening rubric says and certainly there is an element of patri-

Alan Stanbrook

otic fervour in the picture. But it does not take long to realise that Paradjanov is also after something else. Even the legend that is the cornerstone of the film has undercurrents far removed from simple chauvinism—and, indeed, from Marxism, which may be one of the undeclared reasons for Paradjanov's difficulties in Russia. (Officially he was jailed for homosexuality, a crime in the Soviet Union, and alleged currency offences.)

It is a story of sacrifice, in which one man—the brightest and the best—lays down his life for many. It tells of the construction of a fortress to keep out foreign invaders and the mysterious force that causes it to crumble and collapse each time it nears completion. Only one thing can prevent this. The structure will stand, says a local sooth-

sayer, if a young man agrees to be bricked up within its walls.

The plot draws not only on pagan traditions of the sacrificial hero but, in Paradjanov's hands, on Christianity and the notion of redemption. Paradjanov and his scriptwriter, Vazha Ghigashvili, have modified the legend. In the original tale, the young man dies while trying to hold up the walls. His death is foretold and, to a degree, engineered by a former mistress of his father, now bent on revenge.

Paradjanov threw out the melodrama, replacing it with elements and themes linked on the one hand to the primitive world of fables, fairy tales and all kinds of spectacle and display and on the other to the Christian ethic. In Paradjanov's version, the young man undergoes ritual entombment as an act of purification and atonement for the sins of others, in particular his own unfaithful father. The sibyl who reveals the secret of reinforcing the Suram walls is the young man's mother, who is left at the end standing vigil over the tomb like the Virgin Mary by the Cross.

Other themes and subplots woven into the story serve to enhance the religious flavour. *The Legend of the Suram Fortress* is divided, like *The Colour of Pomegranates*, into discrete chapters, each with its own heading. Many of these embody specific religious concepts—absolution, prayer, confession, sin and so on. A running thread



The Legend of the





e Suram Fortress



alongside the main story is the parallel tale of a man who won his freedom through violence and who has suffered for it in exile ever since. His story intersects with the main narrative but remains apart from it, almost like an oblique commentary.

He tells his tale (how, as a young man, he and his mother were exploited by a wicked prince, how he killed the prince and had to flee the country, renouncing faith, language and homeland) in an extended flashback. It sets the scene for a later sequence in which, an old man now, he seeks to make reparation for his sins by dividing his wealth among widows and orphans. A good deed, he says, always leaves a trace. Naturally, his priest absolves him. 'Return to your people and to your faith,' he is told. 'Return to your homeland. God is gracious. May God grant man heavenly blessings for his earthly trials and suffering.' Paradjanov would surely say 'amen' to that.

The Christian overtones do not supplant but complement the nationalist theme. *Suram Fortress* can be read on several levels at once. The Georgian flavour of this national epic comes out principally in the film's most delightful sequence, in which the infant Zourab, who will grow into the saviour of his country, is taught its history by a jolly itinerant music-maker called Simon the Piper. Simon plays the *parkapzouk*, a kind of Caucasian bagpipe, but squeezed underfoot rather than underarm. He tells the young boy about Saint Nina, the educator of Georgia, who introduced the land to the Holy Cross, about Queen Tamar and about Amirani, chained like the Greek Prometheus to a rock for stealing fire from the gods. When Amirani breaks his chains, legend has it, Georgia will be free.

This scene is accompanied by the use of marionettes, which recur periodically through the film. Simon the Piper, too, returns to the story at the end. It is he who helps to place the final bricks that will complete the immurement of Zourab and who crowns him with a warrior's helm. As he does so, the puppet figure of Saint Nina is seen looking on as if in approval.

Ponderous nationalist epics are like cinematic calling cards among the Soviet republics. What makes Paradjanov's epic different is the way he films it. *The Legend of the Suram Fortress* looks like only one other film in the history of the cinema—*The Colour of Pomegranates*. The two films are clearly by the same hand, yet *Suram Fortress* is *sui generis*. There is no sense of an artist repeating himself or marking time. This is the most heartening feature of Paradjanov's return to the cinema. Despite repeated (and, among the old guard, continuing) attempts at character assassination, a double dose of imprisonment and the risk of rustiness after fifteen unproductive years, his vision is unclouded and uncompromised. His new work is like a speaker clearing his throat after a time-wasting interruption and carrying on as if nothing had happened.

The first thing to be said about the way *Suram Fortress* looks is that advances in colour film technology over the past fifteen years have made it even more rich and beautiful than *The Colour of Pomegranates*. Here are reds to take your breath away, ice blues of limpid purity, yellows of a splendour seldom before captured on film. The temptation merely to look and not pay attention to what is being said is great. (Spoil yourself once, if you like, and watch it that way, but come back for second helpings—there's food for the mind as well.)

Suram Fortress is made up of a constant stream of breathtaking shots, but Paradjanov has not forgotten the prime need of moving pictures to move. There is scarcely a ravishing shot in the picture that is not also vibrant with life. In one startling image, a funambulist performs prodigious feats on a high wire while a muezzin calls the Moslem faithful to prayer from a minaret deep in the shot. Among the film's many magnificent dance sequences, the first, in which the slave girl Vardo performs for the prince, boasts choreography that seems like a magical distillation of the Arabian Nights.

A structural feature the new film shares with its predecessor is the use of motifs, reflecting the mood of a sequence, at the start of each chapter. Two white doves, a red ribbon and a pitcher of wine evoke a wedding, a goat horn waiting to be blown signifies the beginning of the legend, a sword lying menacingly across a bowl of crimson pomegranates foreshadows the violence to come in the story within the story.

Paradjanov also makes adroit use of jump cuts—a device that, in this context, reproduces the spare, staccato rhythms of certain medieval texts. The archaic flavour is underscored by formalised, emblematic gestures and by a non-naturalistic repetition of phrase and action. In one of the film's most hypnotic scenes, Vardo the slave girl prays successively to three separate saints and heavenly beings, each time donning a different shawl and offering a different animal as sacrifice—a dove for Saint Nina, a cock for the Archangel and a sheep for Saint David.

The most controversial scene is set by the sea shore. Costumed figures send semaphore messages out to sea while, in the background, can be clearly seen the outline of two anchored oil tankers. The incongruity is too conspicuous to be blamed on a Soviet continuity oversight. It pulls you up and would have pulled up anybody looking at the rushes, too. So what was the point? It is hard to think of one other than a somewhat strained attempt to underline the timelessness of the theme. On that occasion, Paradjanov's customary clarity of mind seems to have let him down.

Despite the director's very individual, not to say hieratic, style, *The Legend of the Suram Fortress* is not hard to follow. It is much less difficult, for example, than *The Colour of Pomegranates*, though obscurities in that film may have been due to official shortening

and re-editing. *Suram* is a much more linear tale, with a vigorous narrative drive that seldom digresses. However eye-catching and unaccustomed the images, few are used merely for decoration. Even the opening ritual, involving the crushing of eggs and the pounding of shells, yolks and common earth into a paste, which is baffling on first appearance, proves at the end to be the preparation of the cement with which the youth is to be walled up.

The scene of the entombment is one of the most striking in the film. Zourab's head is seen first in dark outline, almost haloed against the light, then in brilliant spotlight like a saint, while all around white and brown stallions stand and nuzzle as if in awe of what is about to unfold.

Though *Suram Fortress* gives the impression of being a rich, opulent movie, its effects are achieved by the simplest means. All the costumes and props were furnished out of Paradjanov's own collection. Though ancient frescoes were consulted to verify historical detail, the director did not hesitate to add elements from his own imagination where they suited his purpose. He was more concerned with the philosophy of heroism than with factual accuracy.

There are few elaborate sets. One simple courtyard, with blue hills visible in the far distance behind a low wall, is made to serve many functions, like an all-purpose stage set, though what happens in front of it is purely cinematic. The scene of the destruction of the *Suram* fortress as building nears completion is accomplished by an astonishing bit of photographic legerdemain. Instead of pulling down the structure, like Cecil B. DeMille having a field day in the Temple of Dagon, Paradjanov simply shows a reflection of the fortress in a puddle and disturbs the water. Lo and behold, the castle begins to shake and disintegrate. Not for nothing is Sergo Paradjanov—as merry an old soul as King Cole or Father Christmas in private life—known as an incorrigible prankster. This cheeky shot is entirely in character from the man who, told in prison that he must show zeal and fire in carrying out his work, fixed an electric light bulb to his broom.

And where does Paradjanov go from here? He wants to film the national epic, *David of Sassoun*, but that would take a much bigger studio and many more roubles than have so far come his way. Those who have seen him recently report that he is at work on the first draft of what may turn out to be a fairy story. A fundamental shake-up in the management and organisation of Soviet cinema since Mr Gorbachev came to power seems, for the time being, to have opened up more promising prospects for maverick artists like Sergo Paradjanov. For this we can be thankful and count our future blessings. But to those who worked so hard for Paradjanov's release, there are no grounds for complacency. Communist clocks, from Moscow to Peking, have a nasty habit from time to time of running backwards. ■



Happy-Go-Lucky: Vasily Shukshin.

Shukshin: Holidays for the Soul

In Vasily Shukshin's story 'Critics', an old peasant is so incensed by the clumsiness of a television actor portraying a carpenter that he smashes the set with his boot. Practical criticism indeed—and a characteristic expression of Shukshin's contempt for most rose-tinted views of the harsh peasant reality he knew at first hand. It may also explain why intellectual approval lagged so far behind popular acclaim during his lifetime; and why he is still excluded from the Western pantheon of major Soviet artists. Neither a Party cheerleader (though he was a loyal member), nor a dissident nor a mystic, his stories and films emerged from that vast, unfashionable hinterland of rural Russia which all but disappeared from Soviet culture after the traumas of collectivisation and the persecution of the kulaks in the 1930s.

Now, twelve years after Shukshin's early death, an *NFT* retrospective in November follows the first British collection of his stories, *Roubles in Words, Kopeks in Figures*, published last year by Marion Boyars and excellently translated by Natasha Ward and David Iliffe. With the films likely to tour regional cinemas, there's reason to hope that a wider audience than Slavophiles will take the belated opportunity to discover what made Shukshin a folk-hero for countless ordinary Russians—and an awkward case for the critics.

Certainly we needn't be as troubled

as Russian arbiters of taste, in a notoriously professionalised culture, by the problem of his creative identity, or his much-lamented vulgarity. Was he a film actor and director who also dabbled in literature? Or a promising writer distracted by the lure of the screen? If he inclined to the latter diagnosis himself, this was no doubt a reaction to the pointed lack of critical attention his writing received, even when it appeared

Ian Christie

in prestigious journals and began to sell in large editions.

In fact, it was his almost chance enrolment at the Moscow film school *VGIK* in 1954 (prompted by an unknown passer-by, he always claimed) that fostered his writing career. Mikhail Romm encouraged his students to develop their directorial skills in prose, in the tradition of Eisenstein's famous analyses of the 'cinematic' in literature. As a result, Shukshin discovered he had a gift, and his unusually varied experiences before reaching Moscow—as a farmhand, building site worker, sailor and evening school director—provided ample material. Four years later, he found himself an unexpected star, when one of the most promising of the post-Stalin generation of young directors, Marlen Khutsiev, promoted him from student

assistant to lead actor in *Two Fyodors*. This was to be the first of seventeen appearances, only two of them in his own films *Happy-Go-Lucky* and *The Red Snowball Tree*, to which Shukshin brought a conspicuously unactorish authenticity. Nor was he limited to peasant types: his cameo of a washed-out hack confronting the rising young opportunist of Gerasimov's *Journalist* (1967) almost transforms this otherwise lacklustre film.

Perhaps the central irony of Shukshin's short, explosive career was that, while he stood for the neglected values of the village in an increasingly westernised era, he felt increasingly cut off from either milieu. As Yevtushenko recently wrote: 'Among intellectuals he sometimes felt like a rustic; among country folk he felt like an intellectual, and this was just as painful. But at least he was able to avoid idealising either of them.' Like Esenin, the 'peasant poet' of the 20s, and his younger contemporary, the actor-singer Vissotsky, he spoke in a popular and accessible language, stripped of sanctioned jargon, about the experiences that millions could identify with. And he used his growing fame to campaign against the newly fashionable 'rural culture' with which he was quickly identified by the critics. Most of this he dismissed as second-rate and sentimental, a sop to the neglected masses.

The five films he directed are inspired

by the same virtues and doubts as his writing. First impressions, especially for those who know only the Soviet 'art cinema' tradition, can be daunting. They have an almost primitive directness. Short, elliptical scenes of anecdotal humour or pathos are butted together, with scant connecting narrative and frequent use of a restless, probing zoom. The missing context for Western viewers is Shukshin's reaction against the bucolic platitudes of the *kolkhoz* genre. His peasants are crafty, crazy, angry and often dissatisfied with their lot. They are driven, often to excess or eccentricity, by an instinct for *volia*: the old-fashioned Russian word for freedom. They are in perpetual, dissatisfied search of a 'holiday for the soul', as the semi-reformed bank robber of *The Red Snowball Tree* puts it. But this freedom can only be temporary, illusory; no more than the span of a night's drinking, or a journey to the city.

Shukshin's posthumous reputation gives prominence to his last film, *The Red Snowball Tree* (1974), which he wrote, directed and starred in as the ex-con who makes a last despairing, half-hearted attempt to start a new life in the country, under the wing of his prison pen-friend, played by his real-life wife Lydia Fedoseeva. Despite its undeniable pathos and wonderful passages of comic deflation—like Egor's clumsy scolding of his companion in the bathhouse, or the dismal 'orgy' he commissions from a restaurant waiter and has to sit through and pay for—this is by no means Shukshin's only major film. Indeed, alongside *Strange People* (1971) and *Happy-Go-Lucky* (1973), it may not even



Happy-Go-Lucky: Shukshin with Lydia Fedoseeva.

be his best. The first of these explores the fantasy and yearning of the peasant soul in three contrasted episodes, based on previously published stories. It's a wonderfully wry and sophisticated work that manages to convey, simultaneously, Shukshin's ambivalence and reverence for the village tradition and its 'mute inglorious' lives.

Happy-Go-Lucky was his only wholly optimistic film; and appropriately it offers an informal allegory of his own trajectory from village to city, as a Siberian tractor driver and his wife set off by train to a southern spa. Like the enchanted couple of *L'Atalante*, they are innocents abroad; but their innocence

radiates through the train and later the city, transforming all who come in contact with it. Filmed in wide-screen black and white, it has the formal poise and lyricism that Shukshin was reluctant to impose on his other, darker material. And it ends with a fittingly ironic exchange between city and country, when Shukshin writes to the villagers that his new acquaintances 'are closer to Communism, because they have more machines than us'—which provokes the recipients to wonder why he's writing about politics. Shukshin's films reach parts of the Russian experience that few of his fellow countrymen have contemplated since the 1920s. ■

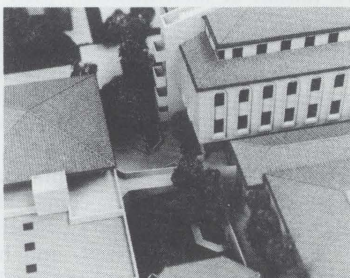
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HIGH STAKES

Terrence Rafferty

In his 1984 novel *The Color of Money*, Walter Tevis returned to his most famous character, Fast Eddie Felson, the brash young straight-pool stud of *The Hustler*. More than twenty years later, Eddie has slowed down quite a bit: he's running a poolroom in Kentucky, not hustling any more, barely playing at all. As the novel begins, Fast Eddie is being lured out of his midlife stupor by the prospect of playing exhibition matches with his old antagonist Minnesota Fats, the great player he beat at the end of *The Hustler*—a moral victory that ended Eddie's hustling career because he refused to pay off the underworld 'stakeholders', the men who put up the money for big-time matches. Thanks to that epic confrontation, Eddie is a legend: in the course of his exhibitions with Fats, he discovers that he would rather be a real pool player again.

In Tevis' novel, says his widow, Eleonora, 'Fast Eddie hadn't played pool for twenty years, just as Walter hadn't written anything for seventeen, at one point in his life.' (He spent the years between his second novel, *The Man Who Fell to Earth*, and his third, *Mockingbird*, teaching and drinking; but after all that wasted time, Tevis published four new novels and a collection of stories between 1980 and his death in 1984.) 'The emphasis of the story is on Fast Eddie as a middle-aged man,' says Eleonora Tevis, 'who has come out of this dream that everyone goes into from the age of thirty to maybe fifty. You wake up and you're fifty and God knows where the last twenty years have gone. The big question for Walter was, How do you walk out on that amount of talent, just run away from it? Fast Eddie was Walter, of course.'

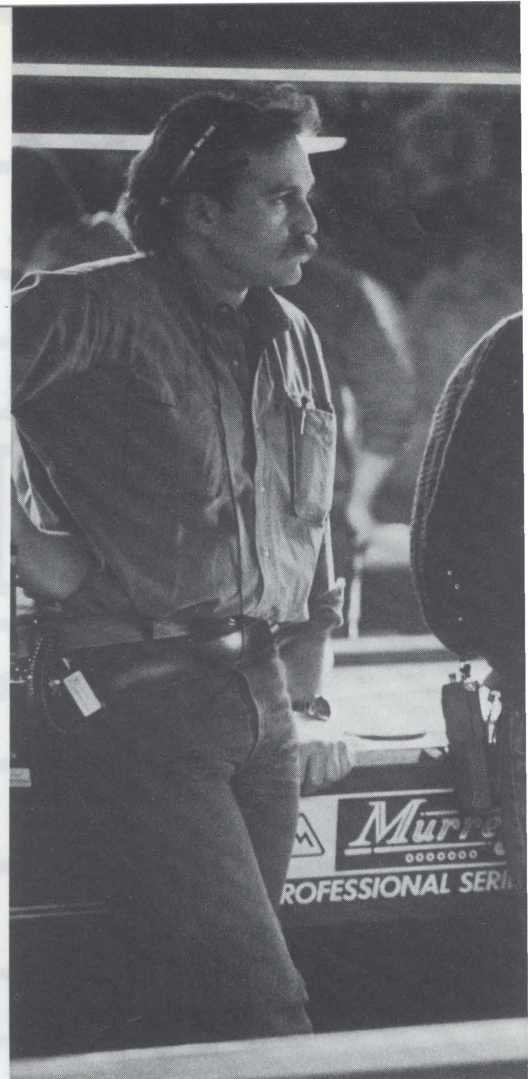
In the film *The Color of Money*, which was shot in Chicago earlier this year and is now being prepared for a Christmas release in the US, the questions will be a little different. There are more people than Walter Tevis identifying themselves with Fast Eddie Felson now: there's also screenwriter Richard Price, director Martin Scorsese and, not least, Paul Newman, returning to the charac-

ter he first played in Robert Rossen's 1961 film of *The Hustler*. Price says: 'You always have to find the thing that connects your autobiography with your subject. Here, it was, "What would happen to me if they took away my ability to write? What would happen to Marty if he couldn't make films?" You turn sour and you curdle, you're denying the thing that gives you life. That's what Fast Eddie does—he doesn't play pool any more and it's killing him. It's his life and his way of making art and he has to rediscover himself to save his ass.'

Scorsese adds: 'What it's really all about is whether he can change his life a little bit and do what he used to do—not in the sense of winning all his games, but just having the guts to go into a poolroom again and play.' Price's and Scorsese's versions of Eddie Felson sound pretty close to what Tevis had in mind, but they decided early on to discard the novel's plot: Felson's matches with Fats, his restorative affair with an Englishwoman, his triumphant return to form in a nine-ball tournament against younger players. 'I thought it was a really good book, and I like Walter Tevis as a novelist, but I thought almost nothing in it was usable,' says Price—perhaps sensing that the writer had made his character entirely in his own image, and that the film-makers would have to remake him in their own.

The 'Fast' part of the character probably came pretty easily to Scorsese and Price. Both are headlong, impatient talkers, spewing out words in sudden cascades of sentences (Price) or rapid, intense spritzes of disconnected phrases (Scorsese). 'When we had our first meeting with Newman,' Scorsese says, 'Richard and I were talking so fast Paul didn't know what hit him.' And both were, like Eddie Felson, quick starters, hot shots in their twenties: the first of Price's four novels, *The Wanderers*, was published when he was twenty-four; Scorsese made three features, including *Mean Streets*, before turning thirty.

The cockiness and wired grace of Newman circling the table in *The Hust-*



ler, firing off perfect shots and smart remarks with dazzling speed, must have appealed to them; it's not surprising that the dazed, beaten Eddie Felson in the opening chapters of *The Color of Money* didn't. 'It just didn't seem to me,' says Scorsese, 'that a character like that would be washed up completely. If he didn't play pool, he'd do something else. So we made him into a stakeholder. Richard came up with the idea that he'd be a liquor salesman on the side, make a lot of money. Now he's got a white Caddy, a moustache, incredible clothes, looks terrific—he's still a hustler, but he makes his living putting up the money, not playing pool.'

'I was interested in Bruno Bettelheim's notion of identification with the aggressor,' Richard Price says. 'You become the thing that you're most terrified of and that makes you most powerless. What makes Fast Eddie Felson most powerless in his life? That's the George C. Scott character in the first film, the guy that told him he can't play any more. So Newman should become, when he reaches that age, George C. Scott—a cynic, a user of pool players, and hate himself and deny all the hunger and lust for this sport that he had when he was a young man. That's the premise, that he's now the cold bankroller who refuses to pick up a pool cue. I decided, too, that he should be a sort of Fagin, and discover a young kid who reminds him of himself, the self he's out of touch with. He is intrigued by the kid and wants to make



The Color of Money: Martin Scorsese and Paul Newman. Photo: Ron Phillips.

a lot of money out of him, but he's really hungry to recover something—even though he doesn't understand that. The story is him teaching the kid how to be a bastard, ruining his purity because it's threatening to him.'

Scorsese brought Richard Price into the project after rejecting a couple of screenplay drafts by another writer (the first screenplay, by Tevis himself, was turned down by the studio long before Scorsese signed on). Price obviously gave the director the 'fresh start' he felt was needed, and the new conception of Fast Eddie took the material decisively into what Scorsese calls 'my territory, which is basically a bar or a poolroom with a bunch of guys drinking liquor and beating each other for money. It's a study in total manipulation.' In this case, the writer was able to give the director what he wanted because he was working for someone who had helped shape his own sensibility. 'In a way, Marty was always my hero,' says Price, 'and more of an influence on my novels than any writer. *Mean Streets* was like a scrapbook of my fantasies; I couldn't wait to go home and write. I wound up seeing it fourteen times.'

By the time the cameras started to roll in January—after a year of what Price calls 'endless fine tuning' of the screenplay with Newman and Scorsese—*The Color of Money* had already been transformed from the private vision of a novel to the wider, collective project of a movie, in which everyone involved had

staked something. The more abrasive, streetwise, cynical approach to Fast Eddie means only that Scorsese and Price have projected their own personalities and experiences on to the character, a character whose history already has the quality of a hard American fable of ambition and talent, success and corruption, the euphoria and the gravity of play.

The charged, hazy moral world that Tevis created in his first novel—and that Newman and Rossen embodied and magnified on the screen twenty-five years ago—has, ironically, proved too powerful and too deeply familiar to remain exclusively his: 'The rectangle of lovely, mystical green, the colour of money,' he wrote about in *The Hustler* is territory everyone has a claim on. When *The Hustler* was reprinted in 1984, the author felt compelled to add a note that indicated his problems in keeping this product of his imagination fixed in its personal, fictional territory, the realm of its origin: 'I once saw a fat pool player with a facial tic. I once saw another pool player who was physically graceful. Both were minor hustlers, as far as I could tell. Both seemed loud and vain—with little dignity and grace, unlike my fat pool player. After *The Hustler* was published, one of them claimed to "be" Minnesota Fats. That is ridiculous. I made up Minnesota Fats—name and all—as surely as Disney made up Donald Duck.'

Fats (played by Jackie Gleason in the first film) won't be onscreen in *The Color*

of Money, nor will the sinister Bert (the George C. Scott role). Their powerful presences have, in a sense, been collapsed into Eddie Felson's character, their meanings repeated in his ambiguous relationship to his young protégé (Tom Cruise). Fast Eddie may seem to have multiplied, out of control, over the years, as if he were walking through a corridor of mirrors: this production will show if he has been gathering the light from all our reflections. The force of Richard Price's desire to 'emulate the sensibility' of an artist who influenced his earlier work profoundly should be in there somewhere. So should Scorsese, testing himself as he always does ('The way I make pictures, they're all personal, one way or another'), this time on an especially rich proving ground. He's working with Paul Newman, 'whom I saw in the movies when I was ten years old,' and trying to find out 'if we can connect on the same level.'

Scorsese is hoping to make something that will stand on its own, with 'no reference' to the classic which provided its main character. He's returning to the thematic obsessions, the nightworld atmosphere and even the camera style of his own earlier work. Michael Ballhaus is his cinematographer, as he was on *After Hours* (1985). 'I was able to do my camera movements again the way I wanted to, the way I used to.' And he's trying, too, to recover some of his old speed, the Fast Marty spirit of his 70s films: after making only one film, *The King of Comedy*, in the first five years of this decade, Scorsese has shot two features and a half-hour television film for Spielberg's *Amazing Stories* in the last year and a half. 'Certain films,' he now feels, 'don't necessarily have to take that long. I'm trying to get past the idea that to make a movie every shot has to be the greatest. When you work that way, everything takes on such importance that you suddenly find yourself overwhelmed.' *The Color of Money* finished shooting a day ahead of schedule.

The real world of pool will be represented in *The Color of Money*, too: many of the players Price and Scorsese met during their research were given parts in the movie ('These guys are professional hustlers, so they're all actors already,' Price says), and the settings are the actual poolrooms of Chicago, the site of Tevis' first novel. And Walter Tevis, although his story wasn't used, will be present, as surely as the young Paul Newman of *The Hustler* persists in the more experienced face we'll see in the new film—it's the imprint of a character and a world that are lodged in the memories of everyone who worked on this movie and everyone who'll watch it. Come December, all the Fast Eddies now circling around Martin Scorsese's editing table will resolve into a single image: the one the audience makes for itself, from its own experiences, its own memories. If the finished product reflects its making, *The Color of Money* will be everybody's autobiography. ■

FROM THE NIGHTMARE FACTORY

HUAC and the Politics of Noir

PHILIP KEMP



Where Danger Lives:
Robert Mitchum and Faith Domergue.

The bourgeoisie, wherever it has got the upper hand . . . has left remaining no other nexus between man and man than naked self-interest, than callous 'cash payment' . . . It has resolved personal worth into exchange value.

—Marx and Engels,
The Communist Manifesto

It has often been observed that the key period of American film noir—roughly 1945 to 1954—coincides neatly with the years of the great anti-Communist witch-hunt, of HUAC (House Committee on Un-American Activities), McCarthy and the blacklist. Noir, with its pervasive atmosphere of fear and paranoia, its sense of hopeless fatalism ('Fate or some mysterious force,' muses the hero of *Detour*, 'can put the finger on you or me for no good reason at all'), presents an oblique response to the political climate of those years. Less often considered—and less easy to delineate—is the political *content* of the cycle: noir as statement, rather than as response.

Where Danger Lives, one of the lesser-known noir movies, was made by RKO in 1950. Robert Mitchum, a surgeon at San Francisco General Hospital, becomes infatuated with one of his patients, an attempted suicide, played by Faith Domergue. She evades his suggestions of marriage, talking of an elderly father 'living on borrowed time'. Mitchum confronts this obtrusive parent (a regrettably brief appearance from Claude Rains, silkily malignant), who turns out to be Domergue's husband. They quarrel; Rains hits Mitchum with a poker, Mitchum knocks him down and seemingly kills him. The guilty couple take off, heading for the Mexican border. En route Mitchum displays progressive signs of delayed concussion, and Domergue's behaviour grows increasingly unstable. Finally, holed up in a sleazy border town, he realises that she must be psychotic, and that it was she who murdered Rains. He accuses her; she tries to kill him, but is gunned down by the police.

If the plot of *Where Danger Lives* seems familiar, it may be because much of it anticipates *Angel Face*, made two years later—also for RKO—by Otto Preminger, in which Mitchum's ambulance driver gets entangled with the even more lethal Jean Simmons. Simmons' cool, accomplished performance easily outclasses the relentless pouting of Domergue, and indeed *Angel Face* is by some way the better movie of the two. Though both Mitchum and Rains make the most of their roles, and Nicholas Musuraca—after John Alton, probably the finest noir cinematographer—casts some atmospheric shadows, *Where Danger Lives* is minor-league noir at best. Nevertheless, it remains an intriguing film for two reasons, neither of which has much to do with its artistic quality. First, because it can be read, without any strain on the text, as a dramatic exposition of the Marxist dictum quoted above. Secondly, because it was almost certainly never intended as any such thing.

Mitchum, we learn from the start, is a dedicated and selfless doctor, working fifteen hours at a stretch, making up bedtime stories ('Things looked pretty bad for Elmer the elephant') for the children in his ward. In fact, the only unselfish people who appear in the film are the staff of this public hospital—among them Mitchum's girlfriend, a figure of angelic forbearance played by Maureen O'Sullivan (wife of John Farrow, the film's director). But already the lure of the cash nexus threatens to rupture the world of socialised altruism. A young patient accuses Mitchum of being about to 'go away'.

NURSE (with hint of reproach): I told him you were leaving us, doctor—to go into private practice.

MITCHUM (embarrassed): Well, I won't be going for a couple of weeks...

And enter, on cue, Domergue, incarnation of the acquisitive instinct, to lure him into a world of gaudy nightclubs, where the patrons sip cocktails out of coconut shells. Just in case we should find this acceptable face of capitalism superficially attractive, however, the film loses no time in exposing the ugly

impulses that lie behind it.

In his confrontation with Mitchum, Rains expounds the basis of his marriage to Domergue: a textbook illustration of 'personal worth resolved into exchange value'. 'Margot married me for my money. I married her for her—youth. We both got what we wanted—after a fashion.' This revelation offers Mitchum his last chance of escape, back to O'Sullivan and social responsibility. He stays, and is drawn into the exchange of violence which precipitates him into the shadow-land of venality.

From here on in, Domergue's values rule. Mitchum, gripped by creeping paralysis of his social conscience ('My whole left side's beginning to get numb'), has abdicated control. They flee southwards, through a society deformed and corrupted by the lust for cash. In Fresno, a used-car dealer (a fine portrayal of chortling rapacity from Tol Avery) swiftly sizes up their situation and forces them to swap their plush limousine for a rickety truck. Passing through a small township, they collide with a drunken Mexican, and to avoid questions buy him off with the connivance of the kindly, white-haired local doctor. Thirty miles from the border, they are arrested—because Mitchum has no beard. The town is holding a Whiskers Week, a pretext to con \$25 out of unwary passers-by.

And so finally to the border town of Nogales—a city of dreadful night where the mercenary instinct has supplanted all other human impulses. A cigar-chomping pawnbroker (a statue of blind justice on ironic display among his stock) allows them \$1,000 on Domergue's \$9,000 bracelet, and passes them on to the nextdoor theatre manager, who in turn hands them over to a seedy impresario prepared to smuggle them across the border for \$1,000. ('American dollars—cash.') When Mitchum protests, the pawnbroker materialises to clinch the deal: 'Young fella—how are things back in San Francisco?' The circle of venality is complete. Only with the death of Domergue, dark angel of avarice, is Mitchum set free, waking in a clean white hospital room to O'Sullivan's forgiving smile.

It is my determination to make RKO one studio where the work of Communist sympathisers will be impossible.

—Howard Hughes

In 1950 RKO, Cinderella of the Hollywood majors, lay in the erratic grip of Howard Hughes. That same year shooting began on *Jet Pilot*, surely the least Sternbergian of Sternberg's movies, in which John Wayne as a US airman persuades Janet Leigh, bizarrely cast as his Russian counterpart, of the superiority of the American way of life by flying her to Palm Springs and feeding her on steak.

Jet Pilot, planned as the *Hell's Angels* of the jet age, was a project especially dear to Hughes' heart, and by all accounts this 'right-wing camp on a comic strip level' (as Andrew Sarris described it) closely reflected his political outlook. As far as anyone knows, Hughes never voted in his life, impartially regarding all politicians, Republican or Democrat, as commodities to be purchased when they could be of use. Only one cause ever engaged his interest: anti-communism. According to his chief of staff, Bill Gay, Hughes 'felt that communism versus free enterprise was such an important issue in our time. It was one of the few issues in his life that he felt strongly about.' Strongly enough not only to fire the writer Paul Jarrico, who had taken the Fifth Amendment before HUAC, but to remove his credit from *The Las Vegas Story*, a vapid Jane Russell vehicle, and, when the Screen Writers Guild arbitrated in Jarrico's favour, to fight the Guild through the courts, and win.

Yet this was the man whose studio could produce, simultaneously with *Jet Pilot*, a film so deeply critical of capitalist values as to border on Marxist allegory. It might be imagined that a routine thriller like *Where Danger Lives* would simply have been beneath the boss's notice—but in this case, apparently not. Hughes took a close interest in the career of Faith Domergue, one of his less successful protégées, and this picture marked the final attempt to establish her as a popular sex symbol.

If Hughes seems an unlikely exponent of socialism, the same could be said of

Where Danger Lives: Mitchum, Domergue and pawnbroker.



Angel Face: Morgan Brown, Jean Simmons, Robert Mitchum.



those directly concerned in making the film. The director, John Farrow, was a Catholic, devout to the point of excess. Holder of an LL.D. from Loyola University (Cal), author of *Damien the Leper* and *Pageant of the Popes*, he was made Knight of the Holy Sepulchre in 1937 for his services to the Church. 'The house was always filled with priests,' his daughter Mia recalled. 'To some extent he looked down on Hollywood.'

The screenplay of *Where Danger Lives* was written by the English-born Charles Bennett, who scripted several of Hitchcock's best British movies (*The Man Who Knew Too Much*, *Sabotage*, *The 39 Steps*). During the war he worked for the FBI and US Naval Intelligence. Leo Rosten, on whose story Bennett's screenplay was based, was the successful and prolific author of *Hollywood: The Movie Colony*, *The Movie Makers*, *The Joys of Yiddish* and *The Education of Hyman Kaplan*, among much else. His view of the witch-hunt years was expressed in a 1956 article in *Look*: 'The record of what the party henchmen tried to do in the movie colony makes an appalling story. They lied, they deceived, they manipulated, they cheated... They used the psychological tactics of the Gestapo and the political tactics of the gutter... The scars they left on Hollywood are deep and tragic.' He was, of course, referring to the Communists.

Rosten was also at one time Special Consultant to the US Secretary of War. Neither he, Farrow or Bennett ever attracted the attention of HUAC, and all three continued to work in the movie business throughout the blacklist years.

None of which, admittedly, rates as conclusive disproof of leftist tendencies, and it would be tempting to concoct a Le Carré-esque scenario, with Soviet moles from US Intelligence infiltrating Hollywood for propaganda purposes. Tempting, but implausible and in any case superfluous. For one thing, no closet Marxist drip-feeding subversive attitudes into the studio product would ever, at a time of rabid anti-Red scares, have dared mount so blatant an assault on the capitalist ethos as *Where Danger Lives*. The very stridency of its polemic attests the innocence of its intent. For another, the body of film noir offers far too many similar, if rarely so thoroughgoing, examples of left-wing slant to be credibly attributed to a handful of individuals.

We are interested to see if there existed something that might be called a 'structured sensibility', that is a complex of both conscious assumptions and taken for granted, half-articulated assumptions about art and politics which a number of people held in common.

—Jim Cook, Alan Lovell,
Coming to Terms with Hollywood

It's clear that defining the political stance of a group of films as amorphous as film noir is a problematic undertaking. Noir, most critics agree, is less a genre than a matter of mood, styling and atmosphere shared by a number of

movies made at a particular juncture—economic and technical—of cinematic development. There is considerable disagreement over which films can be admitted into the noir canon. Raymond Durgnat, in his trail-blazing article in *Cinema*, provocatively included *King Kong* and *2001* in his list. Other, stricter taxonomists have preferred to rule out all films in colour, or made after 1955, or with happy endings.

As for noir's politics, many writers would deny that it has any. In Colin McArthur's view, 'The meanings spoken by the film noir are not social, relating to the problems... of a particular society, but metaphysical, having to do with angst and loneliness as essential elements of the human condition.' Certainly a political slant, of any kind, can't be demanded as a prerequisite component of noir, and the idea of a right-wing noir movie involves no contradiction in terms. (*Pickup on South Street* comes to mind, though Fuller's film is ambiguous in its ideology, as well as tackier specimens like *I Was a Communist for the FBI*.) But even if explicit political statements are rare in film noir, it can be argued that most of these pictures share a set of implicit, perhaps even inadvertent attitudes to society which readily lend themselves to interpretation as left-wing.

There were of course avowed leftists, of various shades, among the writers and directors of film noir, and many of them

Frank Lovejoy in *I Was a Communist for the FBI*.

introduced socialist views into their work, if not necessarily with the express aim of advancing the cause. As Abraham Polonsky put it, 'I don't ask myself, "Now what are the social issues I have to realise here?" There's a Marxian world view behind my films, not because I plan it that way. That's what I am.' Most of them fell victim, one way or another, to McCarthyism: some recanted (Rossen, Dmytryk), some were blacklisted (Howard Koch, Albert Maltz, Polonsky), some driven into exile (Losey, Dassin), some self-exiled (Welles, Huston). But attitudes which would seem, on the face of it, to derive from equally leftward thinking frequently recur in noir movies made by people with no known left affiliations. If we reject the notion of some vast, clandestine network permeating every Hollywood studio, we seem to be faced with only one other option: that for nearly a decade one aspect of American film-making was pervaded by a set of political assumptions so widely held as to have become virtually undetectable both by those who expressed them and those who virulently opposed them.

To develop this thesis thoroughly would need a volume of detailed analysis beyond the scope of an article. But we can perhaps isolate a few notably recurrent themes. These themes are almost wholly negative in scope—not surprisingly, given the inherent pessimism of the noir cycle. Descriptive rather than prescriptive, film noir explores the





Phantom Lady: Ella Raines and reluctant witness.

symptoms of a deformed society, but rarely suggests remedies. (Much the same could, after all, be said of *Das Kapital*.)

1. Pecunia vincit omnia. 'Has money completely lost its power? Is everyone now dominated by love?' demands Claude Rains in *Rope of Sand*, pained by Burt Lancaster's refusal to co-operate. Of course it hasn't, and everyone isn't. Lancaster, ennobled by his love for Corinne Calvet, is a weird aberration. Elsewhere, as always in noir, the 'callous cash payment' rules supreme in a society cankered by greed. Most noir protagonists, and most of the supporting players too, are motivated, like Robert Young in *They Won't Believe Me*, by an 'obsessive desire to stay in the money at all costs.'

The corrosive power of money is a common enough theme, not only in Hollywood cinema. But where film noir differs is that it portrays single-minded cupidity as standard, the element in which everyone swims. A 1930s gangster—Cagney, Muni or Robinson—might be ruthless in pursuit of loot, but against him there stood the regular citizen, honest and industrious, supporter of the forces of law. The big businessmen of Capra's populist comedies were obdurate and grasping enough, but the little capitalists, the small investors, would rally round and smilingly save the day. *It's a Wonderful Life*, epitome of Capra's work, even includes its own noir sequence in James Stewart's nightmare vision of Pottersville; but the episode is explicitly cancelled out by the closing scene, with its celebration of communal solvency.

2. Class warfare. Class, in prewar Hollywood movies, was largely a source of comedy. The rich were shown as stuffy and uncomfortable, ripe—if they were lucky—for liberation through a blast of down to earth proletarian good sense. Working-class nouveaux riches who aped the manners of the wealthy were

mocked for their pretensions, and in most cases secretly yearned to revert to their natural, unbuttoned ways.

In noir, class is no joke. It functions as an instrument of oppression, a cause of hatred and violence. *The Locket*, directed by John Brahm from a screenplay by Sheridan Gibney, furnishes a mordant parable of the wealth-based class system, and the moral and psychological distortion inflicted on those who live in it. Laraine Day is traumatised by a childhood incident when, as the daughter of a servant in a rich household, she was falsely accused of stealing by her mother's snobbish employer. The resultant kleptomaniac obsession infects her sexual relationships, causing the death of two men, the breakdown of another, and finally her own mental collapse. The locket of the title symbolises the wealth and social privilege to which Day believes her looks and intelligence entitle her, and which she will steal and murder to attain.

3. Land of the free-for-all. Noir depicts a society largely devoid of any communal sense, where the cult of individualism and the deification of free enterprise have eroded belief in loyalty to a general good. Anyone who underestimates the ferocity of the prevailing self-interest is liable to suffer for it. 'I wasn't low or dirty enough,' Barry Sullivan laments in *The Gangster*. 'I should have trusted no one . . . I should have smashed the others first. That's the way the world is.' In the 1930s, heroes on the run, such as Paul Muni in *I Am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang*, could usually hope to meet a few people who, out of common humanity, would help them. In *They Live by Night* Farley Granger rashly assumes as much, and dies.

Social conscience scarcely exists in noir. It's assumed that witnesses (a whole string of them in *Phantom Lady*) can be bribed, suborned or warned off

with barely a token protest. *Kiss Tomorrow Goodbye* has Cagney effortlessly buy up an entire townful of officials. Only fools stand up for their principles, as Rita Hayworth, the lady from Shanghai, tells Orson Welles: 'Everything's bad, Michael. Everything. You can't escape it or fight it. You've got to get along with it, deal with it, make terms.' The nadir of this self-serving logic is attained with Billy Wilder's acerbic *Ace in the Hole*, where virtually everybody furthers personal ends at the expense of a man dying wretchedly in a subterranean crevice.

These are generalised thematic statements, attempts at a distillation of an overall ethos, and exceptions to all of them can easily be cited from this film or that. It's worth bearing in mind, though, Paul Schrader's caveat that in film noir, 'the theme is hidden in the style, and bogus themes are often flaunted ("middle-class values are best") which contradict the style.' The final reel, for example, may be pushing the message that crime doesn't pay; the protagonist may have wound up dead or in custody, an underling may trundle on to toss a sop to the Hays Office—'We got the whole gang rounded up, Chief.' But all those petty chisellers, hustlers and conmen we met along the way are, we know, still out there making a living. A pretty slimy one, maybe, but a living all the same.

When you see a little drop of cyanide in the picture, a small grain of arsenic, something . . . which destroys our beliefs in American free enterprise and free institutions, that is communistic.

—Rupert Hughes, screenwriter, HUAC witness

The paradox is evident. On the one hand a Hollywood running scared, frantic to purge itself of the least taint of leftist connections, with studio bosses eagerly (Howard Hughes, Louis B. Mayer) or reluctantly (Dore Schary, Sam Goldwyn) rooting out alleged subversives, egged on by a pack of Commie-hunters that included HUAC, the American Legion and a chorus of journalists. And on the other hand those same studios producing, right through the hysterical years, an uninterrupted flow of pictures which could easily—had anyone wanted—have been denounced for disseminating anti-American, left-wing propaganda. Films which negate not only what Hollywood claimed it was doing, but what it wanted to do.

The factors involved here—social, political and cultural—are clearly too complex, and too ambivalent, to allow for simple explanations. There's certainly no single answer, and possibly no wholly satisfactory answer. One aspect of the puzzle, though, must bear on the peculiarly circumscribed preoccupations of HUAC itself. For all the loudly professed alarm at the idea of Communists insinuating propaganda into Hollywood movies, the actual content of any given film seems to have been the last thing members of the Committee wanted to consider.

Initially, when HUAC first turned its attention to Hollywood in 1947, a few films were subjected to perfunctory examination. These consisted mainly of such well-meaning attempts at solidarity with the Soviet war effort as *Days of Glory*, *North Star* and *Song of Russia*—about as subversive, most of them, as *Mrs Miniver*. The novelist Ayn Rand, prominent member of the Motion Picture Alliance for the Preservation of American Ideals, assured the Committee that *Song of Russia* must be Communist propaganda, since it featured smiling Russians. Ginger Rogers' mother, the formidable Mrs McMath, testified that her daughter had turned down the title role in a projected version of Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* because it was 'open propaganda'. Walt Disney related how the Screen Cartoonists Guild had tried to make Mickey Mouse follow the Party line, but failed to cite any cartoons where he thought that this had been accomplished.

In 1951, when HUAC launched its major series of investigations into the movie business, Committee members evinced even less interest in what those they interrogated might have put into their movies. By now the Committee was totally obsessed with the grotesque ritual of 'naming names', whereby each witness confessing to past or present involvement with Communism was required to prove contrition by identifying fellow transgressors. These people could then in turn be subpoenaed, and so it went on. No other form of evidence seemed, in the Committee's view, to be worth bothering about.

When Elia Kazan, most famous of the recreants, confessed to one-time Party membership and named former associates, he appended to his testimony a detailed account of the films he had made, defending each against possible charges of left-wing sentiments. Thus, on *Gentleman's Agreement*: 'It won an Academy Award and I think it is in a healthy American tradition, for it shows Americans exploring a problem and tackling a solution. Again it is opposite to the picture which Communists present of Americans...' No one, though, had asked him to provide such a list, and the Committee, apart from a formal word of thanks, ignored it. As far as they were concerned, Kazan had repented and offered up his quota of names, and that was all they wanted of him.

By the same token, those films subjected to boycott or picketing by such bodies as the American Legion or the Catholic War Veterans were rarely, if ever, singled out for alleged subversive content, but simply because they had provided employment for people who should have been denied it. *Born Yesterday* was widely picketed by the Catholic War Veterans, not because it might have infected its audience with un-American ideas, but for starring Judy Holliday, who was suspected of having been sympathetic to Communism. *Born Yesterday* was released in 1950, two or three months after *Where Danger Lives*, which nobody had dreamt of picketing.

As a country and a culture Americans were, during the cold war, governed by the questions they didn't ask.

—Victor S. Navasky, *Naming Names*

In *The Interpretation of Dreams* Freud suggested that, especially under conditions of psychological stress, the 'manifest content' of a dream serves as 'the distorted substitute for the unconscious dream-thoughts, and this distortion is the work of the ego's forces of resistance... The dreamer can no more understand the meaning of his dreams than the hysteric can understand the connection and significance of his symptoms.' Those thoughts which the ego refuses to countenance will be played back by the unconscious, disguised as the innocuous fictions of a dream—or a nightmare.

In her 1956 study of the impact of Communism on Hollywood movies, Dorothy B. Jones found little evidence of any Communist influence at all in the post-1945 period. This was partly because she limited her survey to films in which members of the Hollywood Ten were directly involved, but also, as she explained, because 'the films of the Ten during [the postwar] years were, with a few exceptions, escapist Hollywood fare'—thus assuming as axiomatic that 'escapist Hollywood fare' must be devoid of political content. It could be argued that, on the contrary, standard Hollywood product such as thrillers, romances and gangster movies offers far more effective conduits for political ideas than overtly didactic films.

The term 'escapist', too, begs a lot of questions. As Michael Wood observed in *America in the Movies*, 'It seems that entertainment is not, as we often think, a full-scale flight from our problems, not a means of forgetting them completely, but rather a rearrangement of our problems into shapes which tame them... We should perhaps... ask, not how so many interesting meanings crept into flawed and ephemeral films, but how these films could possibly have kept such meanings out.' Somewhere between Wood's 'taming rearrangements' and Freud's 'distorted substitutes' may lie a facet of one possible resolution of the paradox of film noir.

During the decade immediately following the Second World War, America underwent a prolonged trauma which, in an individual, might have been diagnosed as paranoid schizophrenia. Certain subjects, certain modes of expression, came to be seen as threatening, and were declared taboo. A whole alternative tradition of American political thought was subjected to a savage repression from which, despite the partial resurgence of the 1960s, it has never fully recovered. Doubt, dissatisfaction, the left-wing habit of healthy scepticism were declared un-American and equated with treason. Socialism was deleted from the national curriculum.

These repressed thoughts and feelings, denied overt expression, resurfaced in the California dream factory, outlet for the collective unconscious. Just as a

submerged sexuality can be detected in the novels of such public Victorian writers as Dickens and Trollope, so a submerged socialism bubbles just below the restless, swirling surface of film noir. (And in both cases, probably, the phenomenon is more easily discerned today, with historical hindsight, than it was at the time.) For a while, the dream factory had unwittingly set up a slightly disreputable, wholly-owned subsidiary: the nightmare factory, through whose pale windows the spectre that, a century earlier, had haunted Europe could now do the same for America.

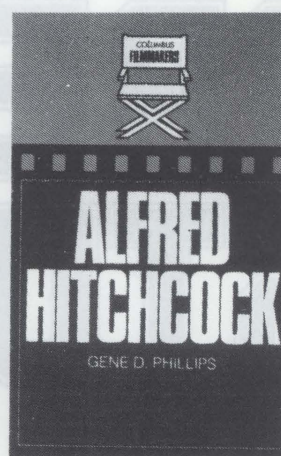
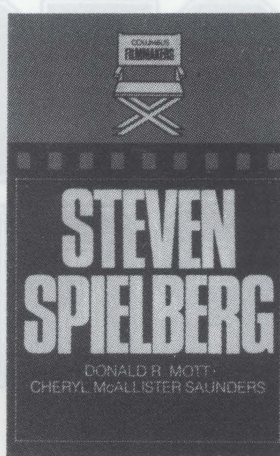
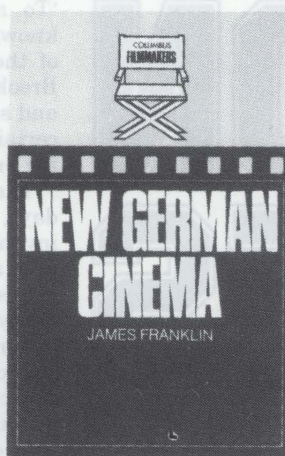
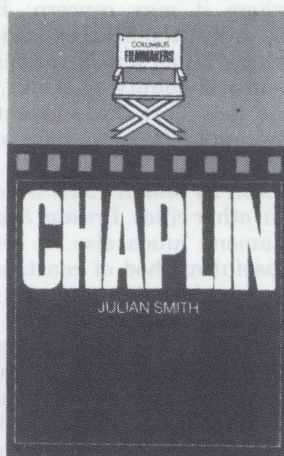
From this viewpoint, film noir can be seen as a riposte, a sour, disenchanted flip-side to the brittle optimism and flag-waving piety of much of Hollywood's 'official' output of the period. All those patriotic parades along Main Street had their sardonic counterpart in the mean streets; the brighter the lights and the louder the drums *here*, the darker the shadows and the more hollow the echoes *there*. The last and darkest phase of film noir, characterised by Paul Schrader as 'the period of psychotic action and suicidal impulse', coincides with the height of the anti-Communist obsession, and the decline of the cycle follows closely on the fall of McCarthy. As the hysteria loosened its grip, the national psyche no longer needed the countervailing subconscious fantasies—or at least, not that particular kind.

Evaluations are always provisional, and perhaps they're really only testimony.

—Raymond Durnat

Noir, alone among the cinematic categories, is an *ex post facto* historical construct, like the Middle Ages. People who filmed Westerns, or comedies, or biopics, knew that that was what they were doing; but nobody who made a film noir during the cycle's key period thought of it as such. (Outside France, the term didn't enter common parlance until the mid-60s, and only such late entries as *Chinatown* or *Night Moves* were planned as self-consciously noir movies.) Hence, perhaps, the innate elusiveness of noir, in which lies much of its fascination. It evades explanation, just as it evades definition. A cinematic black hole, it seems able to ingest any amount of critical theory without losing its lean and hungry look.

Noir also—as witness this article—tends to raise more questions than it answers. 'There is something very important about the idea of film noir, whether or not we are able to completely pin it down.' (The quote, and the hint of desperation, come from Spencer Selby's recent study of noir, *The Dark City*.) Perhaps even more than most other cinematic styles, film noir depends for its impact on non-verbal, essentially visual effects, where form far outstrips content. Attempts at reinterpretation are less likely to arrive at firm conclusions than—with luck—to open up fresh perspectives for exploration. There's still no shortage of secrets lurking in those rain-washed shadows. ■



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PRESTON STURGES

Inventor

Geoff Brown



The Miracle of Morgan's Creek: Preston Sturges (right of hatch) directs Diana Lynn, Eddie Bracken, Betty Hutton, William Demarest.

'To all whom it may concern: Be it known that I, Preston Sturges, a citizen of the United States and a resident of Brooklyn, in the county of Kings, city and state of New York, have invented a certain new and useful process for marking engraved plates.'

That was on 24 March 1924. On other days, and in other cities, Preston Sturges invented, among much else, 'a certain new and useful method of constructing leaf springs so that they may be very easily lubricated'; 'a certain new and useful method of attaching windows to fabric, such as windows in automobile side curtains or windows in tents'; 'a new and useful machine . . . which combines the advantages of the helicopter and the airplane'; a waterproof hinge; a special method of playing chemin de fer; a receptacle for holding ladies' powder; a nail brush combined with a manicure bowl, and sundry other cosmetic niceties; a rowing machine exerciser, where the oars push back of their own volition, forcing the exasperated user to push them out again; a card index system for library use; a modified set of traffic lights; a gadget for making water run up hill; a modified viewfinder for cameras; a small car with a rear engine; a vibrationless diesel for luxury yachts, such as his own; spectacles with green and red lenses, for enhancing the three-dimensional effect of plays, colour films and raw nature; a hearing aid in the form of a telephone, to be called—the inventor hoped—the 'Sturgephone'.

Not all these gadgets received the stamped and sealed dignity of a patent application form; still fewer secured their inventor patents (though the engraving process won through, after two years). But every one bears testimony to Preston Sturges' rapaciously curious, energetic mind. Sometimes the burst of energy produced a well-known film script for Paramount. But it might just as well have produced one of the above, or some custom-built office furniture, or the words and tune of a sentimental song, or a Broadway musical, or a lavish meal cooked over one, or all, of the eight barbecue ovens Sturges owned in his Hollywood prime. Sturges' mind never stayed put in one pigeon-hole, and never relaxed.

It has always been known that Sturges led multiple lives away from the Hollywood studios. In 1937, building on technical knowledge acquired when training in the American Air Service at the end of World War One, he established the Sturges Engineering Company in Wilmington, near Los Angeles harbour. The factory manufactured diesel engines, various trinkets for yachts, and worked for Government contracts during World War Two; Sturges kept at some distance from its daily grind, but his paternal affection for his company and its small staff never wavered. Then in 1940, after a false start two years before with the lyricist Ted Snyder, Sturges moved into restaurant management and built The Players at 8225 Sunset Boulevard.

Patrons could enjoy the cuisine of master chefs while sitting at movable tables mounted on tracks; they could dance in 'The Playroom' with its two revolving bandstands (enabling orchestras to change places without missing a single note); from 1951, they could enjoy theatre shows staged by the proprietor, among them Robert Sherwood's *The Road to Rome*, and *Room Service*, with Eddie Bracken. A draft press release for the latter attraction reads: 'Call Hillside 7303 for reservations and make an appointment with joy. You won't laugh—you will explode.' Customers exploding through drink, not laughter, could be mechanically ejected from their booths by another of Sturges' inventions.

Contemporary journalists noted Sturges' diverse interests throughout his career and relished bizarre biographical tidbits—like his Chicago school debut in Attic dress (his mother's doing), or the ragtime number 'Winky', written as a teenager for Elsie Janis, and a big hit in Latvia, or the kissproof lipstick dreamed up in 1919 for his mother's cosmetics shop, the Maison Desti. Alva Johnston, in the *Saturday Evening Post* (8 and 15 March 1941), hinged an entire two-part profile on Sturges' appendix operation of 1927, which helped turn a fidgety inventor and businessman into a successful playwright. Other authors succumbed to the obvious temptation and interpreted Sturges' biography as a dry run for his films. 'Brilliant Producer of Eccentric Movie Comedies,' ran a *Life* headline on 7 January 1946, 'Had Led an Eccentric, Implausible Life.'

But few commentators tried to put this eccentric, implausible life into focus; 'good copy' was sufficient. James Agee, reviewing *The Miracle of Morgan's Creek* (*Time*, 14 February 1944) and *Hail the Conquering Hero* (*The Nation*, 23 September 1944), took a famous stab at psychoanalysis and pointed a finger at Preston's upbringing. Formative years, Agee noted, were spent seesawing between his stockbroker stepfather Solomon, a solid citizen of Chicago, and his bohemian mother Mary, who trailed round Europe pushing Preston into museums and shepherding her bosom friend Isadora Duncan through financial and romantic crises. From his mother, Agee concluded, Sturges derived his extravagant intelligence and—in adverse reaction to too much culture—an abiding detestation of the beautiful *per se*, the noble emotion nobly expressed; Solomon Sturges, for his part, supposedly fostered 'an exaggerated respect for plain success'.

Business acumen, the success itch, the wild and woolly worship of High Art; Preston certainly grew up with them all, though the more sober virtues were not always on Solomon's side. The stockbroker achieved added success as a champion cyclist of Illinois, and an enthusiastic player of baseball, football and golf; while Mary carved her own business career as a purveyor of cosmetics, offering, among other things, a

novel variety of face powders, attuned to the customer's personality, and 'Secrets of the Harem' (the recipe obtained from her brand-new husband Vely Bey—son of the court physician to the Sultan of Turkey). Indeed, it was as a manager of the cosmetics firm's New York outpost during the 1920s that Sturges first developed his skills for aiming products at the marketplace.

For the moment, it is best to put aside sweeping psychoanalytical judgments and get down to the facts. Thanks to the Sturges papers carefully preserved in the Department of Special Collections at the UCLA research library, facts are more plentiful than they once were. The film scripts and correspondence are there in abundance; but to get the full measure of the man, students should ponder Box 49, containing—in the inventory's alphabetically ordered shorthand—boats,



Sturges at Paramount: playing to the gallery.

casting notes, charities, coat of arms, contract information, diet, directors' salaries, dogs, drawings.' Further boxes sprinkle reasonably sober documents with catalogues for model railway kits, an invitation for Paul Anka's first French concert in December 1958, a leaflet advertising the Sea-Net company's underwater spear-fishing and swimming equipment; and—the collection's *pièce de résistance*—a lock of hair from Sturges' second wife, Eleanor, stored in a used envelope from the Authors' League.

With such evidence before us, we can go some way towards placing Sturges' inventions in the perspective of his entire career. They were not eccentric fringe products; they sprang part and parcel from the same mind that wrote, produced and directed *The Palm Beach Story*, *The Lady Eve* and company—helter-skelter comedies still unrivalled in cinema for their lightning wit, corrosive cynicism, ebullient noise and joy. The inventions, begun in Sturges' youth when he was casting round restlessly for the right career, continued throughout his peak years in Hollywood and were

never merely the product of idleness. One weekend during pre-production work on *The Great McGinty*, for instance, Sturges perfected a modified band-saw, and by 11.38 p.m. on Sunday night, 5 November 1939, had the details down on paper. 'I claim for this saw: That it will give to the band-saw all the advantages of the jigsaw, plus four times its cutting speed.' One suspects, however, that this new lethal saw was just a weekend wonder: Monday morning, *McGinty* and the Paramount office beckoned.

Sturges, indeed, ventured into comedy much in the spirit of an inventor constructing a new machine. Laid low by a burst appendix at Christmas 1927, he decided to turn Irvin S. Cobb's comic book *Speaking of Operations* into a dramatic entertainment, read various practical manuals and set to work. A book by Brander Matthews, Professor of Dramatic Literature at the University of Columbia, proved by far the most useful and influential. From *A Study of the Drama*, published in 1910, Sturges absorbed various tips on construction (clear exposition; development through characters, not situations) and an aesthetic outlook that saw the playwright's primary goals as audience approval and box-office success. 'A play must please the public for whom it is composed,' Matthews wrote, 'and if for any reason it is unable to do this, then it has missed its mark. The final verdict has been rendered; and there is no hope of moving for a new trial. And it must please the whole people, the crowd at large, for the strength of the drama lies in the breadth of its appeal.' Sturges, then, needed no stockbroker stepfather to nourish his 'exaggerated respect for plain success'; Professor Brander Matthews preached a similar gospel, and Sturges never forgot its message.

The immediate result of Sturges' convalescence was a bizarre operetta with a chorus line of medics, destined for the wastepaper basket. But by diligent application he soon produced a comedy suited to a small Broadway run (*The Guinea Pig*) and, in 1929, a palpable hit with 563 performances (*Strictly Dishonorable*). Paramount bosses then courted Sturges as a dialogue writer. For his first assignment he helped turn another Broadway comedy, *The Big Pond*, into a vehicle for Maurice Chevalier—cast as a Frenchman who needed success in American business before marrying the boss's daughter. The play's business was plain and boring—rubber; Sturges characteristically transformed this into chewing gum, and arranged for his hero to revolutionise the product with the accidental invention of gum soaked in liquor.

In 1932, Sturges moved to Los Angeles, having sold the screen rights of *Strictly Dishonorable* and a subsequent play, *Child of Manhattan*; but he kept up with his inventions, and occasionally bent them to cinematic use. Seventh March, 1934, finds him writing to patent

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attorneys with an 'excellent' new idea: canned laughter on the soundtrack of film comedies. In the theatre, Sturges argued, actors were able to pace their delivery to match audience response; in the movies, the editor and director must guess the laughter's length. Their guesses were wrong, Sturges estimated, nine times out of ten—producing awkward pauses when jokes fell flat, and tumult and confusion when they repeatedly hit home. Sturges proposed to juggle with the editing in response to the laughter of various preview audiences, which would be recorded and placed on the soundtrack; to prepare for all eventualities, the camera, during shooting, would linger on the actors' faces after each possible laugh line.

'This has several advantages,' Sturges wrote. 'First of all, it will serve as a *claque* to let people know when to laugh (this may sound ridiculous, but audiences are often afraid to laugh until someone else leads them off). In the second place, laughter is contagious and the enjoyment will be increased. In the third place, no funny lines will be wasted because of the audience laughing through them. Funny lines are hard to get and it is a shame to waste them.' Sturges also considered the advertising angle, and envisaged posters emblazoned with the words 'Audience-Tested' or 'Enjoyment-Tested', with details of the laugh track's provenance presented in a screen foreword. The attorneys, however, failed to find a hook on which to hang any patent, and the notion—like many others—merely languished in Sturges' files.

For that we should be eternally grateful. A Sturges film is cacophonous enough without extra giggles, guffaws and hoots plastered over the soundtrack. But the proposed invention—conceived when he was writing scripts at Universal—tells us much about Sturges' thinking on the craft and temper of comedy. By 1934, Sturges had already completed his breakthrough script *The Power and the Glory*, with its flashback structure and personalised narration, but in many ways he still thought like the earnest student of Brander Matthews and the Broadway author of *Strictly Dishonorable*. *The Power* itself had been conceived very much as a play for the screen, written down whole and presented to Fox on a silver platter (with a price tag of \$17,000, plus a profits percentage). Now he wanted to weave the theatre audience into films, to give the inflexible strip of celluloid some of the bounce, tension and noise of a live theatrical

performance. The process had already begun on radio: after a campaign by NBC's new radio executive in New York, John F. Royal, studio laughter made its debut during an Ed Wynn broadcast in spring 1932. Royal's previous experience was in vaudeville management, where the acts lived and died by the audience's response. Sturges craved applause as much as any vaudevillian, and put his personal credo on the lips of the conductor Alfred de Carter, faced with a timid cymbal player in *Unfaithfully Yours*: 'Be vulgar by all means, but let me hear that brazen laugh.'

As his Hollywood career advanced, Sturges continued to press the claims of cinema—or at least his own films—as a modified version of theatre. 'I worked out a rather deep-dish theory defining the theatre as a form of architecture rather than a form of literature,' Sturges wrote in preparatory drafts for his unfinished autobiography *Events Leading Up to My*



The Lady Eve: Sturges with Barbara Stanwyck and Henry Fonda.

Death. 'From this I deduced that the motion picture was the Theatre in its Modern Form, being handy and cheap and necessary, and used constantly by millions of people, instead of being something you see once on your wedding trip, like Niagara Falls or Grant's Tomb.' If theatre's job was to aim itself, in Brander Matthews' phrase, at 'the whole people, the crowd at large', then the movies could obviously embrace the crowd far more easily.

At the same time, Sturges steadily moved away from the theatrical conception of comedy with laugh lines that must not be obscured. Many visual gags, to be sure, remained on the level of simple slapstick—Sturges worshipped the chase and pratfall—but his dialogue developed into sinuous paragraphs, overlapping lines, abrupt salvos of questions, oaths and insults, lisps, stutterings, and sound effects both rude and whimsical. There are hardly any breathing spaces for his mature characters, especially in *The Miracle of Morgan's Creek* and *Hail the Conquering Hero*. There are certainly no spaces for officially approved, canned

laughter. The invention, even so, maintained a phantom existence right into the 1940s. Sturges persisted in trying to document and dissect the hilarity his films generated; during preview screenings he would estimate his success with a laugh-meter and his own personal points system. A chuckle scored one point; a modest laugh was worth two, while the brazen kind brought in three. Top score was four for a yell.*

Few of Sturges' other inventions were related so directly to film-making, though he always liked tinkering with technical equipment. He toyed with loopless cameras and projectors, and tried to improve the quality of 16mm soundtracks and rear-projection. (This last proposal was among those submitted to the attorney firm of James T. Barkelew and Harold E. Scantlebury—were they plucked from a register simply because of their wonderful names?) His most grandiose cinematic scheme, mooted in the mid-40s, was for a nationwide chain of 200 theatres, all personally designed by Sturges, all equipped with his own inventions, and all showing Sturges' films. Other film-makers' product would get a look in from time to time, Sturges intimated, but the product would have to be good. The Sturges cinema chain would have been the crowning example of single authorship in America. From the film's script, production and direction to the seats, the box-office and refreshment rooms: everything would be Sturges-designed, the last word in comfort, ingenuity and hilarity. But the chain remained an impossible dream; Sturges had to remain content with the normal cinema outlets.

At home and at work, however, Sturges successfully shaped the environment to his own tastes. He lived at 1917 Ivar Boulevard, Hollywood, surrounded by ship models, toy trains, self-designed interior fittings, ping-pong tables and the eight barbecue ovens. At Paramount he conceived his own office furniture—a wrap-around desk 25 feet long with the secretary boxed within and Sturges sprawling on the outside. For office equipment, Sturges relied on the conventional telephone, typewriter, filing cabinets and bookcases; the desk also boasted a built-in aquarium and an old-fashioned car horn, useful for summoning the secretary and infuriating guests. 'Honk, honk. He thought it was god-damned funny,' W. R. Burnett recalled, much later (*Film Comment*, 1983).

Thus ensconced, Sturges put into production films offering steadfast evidence of an inventor's mind in their spirit, subject and detail. In *The Great Moment*, produced in 1942 by a grudging Paramount, Sturges devoted an entire film to the Boston dentist W. T. G. Morton and his discovery in the 1840s of

* A recent book on Sturges, *Intrepid Laughter* by Andrew Dickos (Scarecrow Press), quotes a sample result from *Sullivan's Travels*, screened on 23 September 1941, at the Academy Theatre, Inglewood, Los Angeles: 131 chuckles, 54 ordinary laughs, 23 extraordinary laughs and 8 yells. Sum total: 216 approving noises, and 340 points.

the anaesthetic effects of ether, dwelling on the perils, setbacks and triumphs of research, the legal squabbles and professional backbiting. In these matters Sturges clearly saw Morton (played by Joel McCrea) as an inventor-in-arms, fellow sufferer of the world's slings and arrows and the Establishment's disdain. ('Go back to your tooth-yanking, and leave science to the scientists,' Morton's former teacher Dr Jackson tells another questioning dentist.)

Such was Sturges' obsession with the inventor's plight that he momentarily forgot Brander Matthews' dictates, and made a film without obvious audience appeal. For what wartime moviegoer, faced with Betty Grable, or Greer Garson, or Judy Garland, would forfeit those ladies for a film about a *dentist*—a film whose dramatic effects rely on the apprehension of physical pain? To some extent, Sturges tried to balance the pain with laughter. The aftermath of Morton's great moment might be bitterness and public neglect, but the road to anaesthesia is strewn with pratfalls, running jokes, comic misfortune and the grimaces of Sturges' usual repertory company. The fumes of sulphuric ether, accidentally imbibed, send Morton rolling around the floor; laughing gas applied to Grady Sutton produces laughter in abundance, but leaves the nerve-ends of his teeth entirely unaffected; after a dose of low-quality ether, William Demarest goes on the rampage, wrecking Morton's office and crashing through a window on to an awning, into the street. From all this tomfoolery, Morton emerges some steps removed from the historical source, as a forgetful, good-hearted plodder, working towards his discovery more by luck than rigorous logic and scientific judgment. Sturges wasn't interested in inventors with MGM haloes; he knew the breed too well.

Sturges also conceived eccentric inventions directly for his films. Joel McCrea warmed up for his part as Morton by playing Tom Jeffers in *The Palm Beach Story*—another harassed inventor, with a grand scheme for an airport suspended, net-like, over a city. Passengers would land on steel netting firm enough to support a plane, fine enough to be scarcely visible from ground level. All Jeffers needs to launch the venture is \$99,000—money eventually provided, after many absurd complications, by the filthy-rich John D. Hackensacker III (Rudy Vallee). Hackensacker owns some Manhattan real estate that might provide a terminal building, and he needs, he says, something to occupy his mind—even though the airport wasn't exactly what he hoped for.

Elsewhere, Sturges and the set designers gave his characters—like the patrons at *The Players*—all the benefits of the inventor's mod cons. In Sturges' script for *Easy Living*, Jean Arthur—the supposed amour of the powerful financier J. B. Ball—is offered accommodation in the Hotel Louis' most ridiculously luxurious suite, containing numerous salons, reception rooms, bedrooms, an 'undress-



The Lady Eve: Henry Fonda, William Demarest, Robert Greig.

ing room' with a six-way mirror, a pool, a rocking horse and a huge bath sprouting fish-shaped faucets at both ends. Dick Powell, the perpetual contest entrant in *Christmas in July*, gets a smaller taste of luxury by spending some of his phantom prize money buying his mother a 'davenola' at the Shindel Brothers store. Here is a sofa that not only houses a handsome double-bed; a touch of a button also produces, from its arms and legs, a radio, an ashtray, a reading lamp, a telephone and, in the salesman's words, 'many accessories too numerous to mention'. Another button

causes the mattress to vibrate. A positive snip at \$198.50, plus tax.

In other films Sturges lovingly showcased existing gadgets. Look at the Simplicitas Home Recording unit in *Unfaithfully Yours*, which enables Alfred de Carter to further his wife's demise—and trap her supposed lover—by simulating her screams himself with the variable speed switch. Look at the election montage in *The Great McGinty*, where Brian Donlevy tours the polling booths voting, we are told, 37 times. In a swiftly edited scherzo, he closes the curtains with a pull on the operating

'Four for a yell': Joel McCrea in *Sullivan's Travels*.



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bar, flicks the button with the lucky candidate's name from the row of possible choices, yanks the bar towards him to clear the booth for the next customer—a smirk constantly playing round his face. Sturges' principal intention was to show the democratic process being mischievously, and physically, manipulated; but he is also giving homage to an ingenious contraption he might well have invented himself.

Like Tom Jeffers and his airport in the clouds, Sturges had many film ventures that remained stuck to the drawing-board. A brief production pact with his fellow inventor and maverick Howard Hughes produced *The Sin of Harold Diddlebock* and a string of fancy notions (like *Nine Pine Street*, from a play inspired by the Lizzie Borden case, to be directed by D. W. Griffith, to star Lillian Gish). Some projects, like *Look, Ma, I'm Dancin'*, and *Nothing Doing*, were developed into several draft scripts. Others were no more than mayflies (in November 1950, he made note of an 'idea for a story conceived while shaving following announcement of death of GBS today') or suggestive titles awaiting plots (*Low Comedy in the High Sierras*; *The Trail of the Lonesome Piano*; *Lady, Look Out for That Horse*). Some of these films, perhaps, we are better off without; but it would have been good to see *The Wizard of Whispering Falls*, a late 40s project, for this seems to have been conceived as a cockeyed companion to *The Great Moment*, and a perfect showcase for Sturges' quirkiest gadgets.

Alas, this story about a small-town inventor of philanthropic bent who crowns a string of failures with one resounding success never progressed further than a story outline. Even that outline offered little in the way of a plot; Sturges' attention was waylaid, typically, by the exact invention that hit the jackpot. His first thought was tiny cat biscuits, made of fish and meal, invitingly shaped like fish themselves. He then proceeded from cats to traffic. A 'cross-continental after-the-war automobile' with both right and left-hand drive? A small car that ran sideways to facilitate easy parking? Traffic signals that gave five seconds warning of impending change by 'blinking and wagging'? After considering such delights, the shade of W. T. G. Morton rises again, and Sturges' outline degenerates into grumbles about the inventor's plight: 'The us owes a great debt to its inventors. Far from being grateful to them, it places every obstruction in their way and makes it

enormously difficult to secure a patent... All great inventions have been the work of a single man, working by himself and not admired by his neighbours.'

Sturges' Wizard may have been isolated and thwarted in Whispering Falls, yet he had plenty of soulmates in the director's life and films. On and off screen, Sturges was obsessed with the marketable skill, with the gadget or talent that could reap rich rewards and please the public. His characters had the Horatio Alger itch to make good and make money, whether by politics (*The Great McGinty*), movies (*Sullivan's Travels*), big business (*The Power and the Glory*, *Diamond Jim*) or entering advertising contests (*Christmas in July*). Sturges himself relished the vast popular audience at the cinema industry's fingers, and deliberately courted that audience by larding the films with slapstick. Not that he needed much encouragement; he loved to see his loquacious, preening characters trip over furniture, fall headlong into swimming pools and *hors d'oeuvres*, tumble downstairs or collide in careening cars. But he also sensed that his taste was the public's: a list of 'eleven rules for box-office appeal' drawn up in 1942 began with 'A pretty girl is better than an ugly one,' progressed to 'A leg is better than an arm' and 'A chase is better than a chat,' and ended proudly with 'A pratfall is better than anything.' John L. Sullivan, the Hollywood director in *Sullivan's Travels*, had come to the same conclusion the previous year.

Failure fascinated Sturges as much as success. He repeatedly built scenarios around ironic reversals in social fortune

and the twists of fate that turn professional victory into personal defeat. Humble characters are plunged into the high life through accidents or pranks: a hurled fur coat landing on her shoulders completely changes Jean Arthur's status in *Easy Living*; while an office practical joke causes Dick Powell to spend most of *Christmas in July* falsely believing he is \$25,000 richer. McGinty works himself up from tramp to political boss, while John L. Sullivan works himself down from highly paid film director to tramp. In *The Great Moment*, Morton's discovery of the anaesthetic effects of ether proves a boon to medical science, but leads to his personal ruin. Sturges himself rode the rollercoaster of success and failure. In 1947, with a salary of \$370,650, he was estimated as the country's third highest paid citizen, but by the early 50s he was on Hollywood's sidelines, trying to brush off bankruptcy, shunted out of studio contracts by a reputation for profligacy, intransigence and a series of costly flops. His other activities suffered accordingly. Creditors forced the sale of The Players restaurant in December 1953; the Sturges Engineering Company went the same way the following year.

When Sturges' meteoric success reached its peak, his inventing time was inevitably curtailed. Studio matters dominated the day, and promising devices twiddled their thumbs. On 23 February 1939, when still a Paramount scriptwriter desperate to clamber into the director's chair, Sturges wrote a memorandum to himself: 'P.S. Make design for electric massaging belt to be worn each day in comfort while reading

Christmas in July: Franklin Pangborn, Raymond Walburn.



or walking around the room.' The fate of the invention is uncertain, but by the end of that year, with his career suddenly shifting gear, Sturges could certainly have used the belt as he paced round the office nursing his two current brain-children—the production of *The Great McGinty*, his directing debut, and the construction of *The Players* (which began as *McGinty* was filming).

Sturges prepared for this testing time by cutting down on drink, cigarettes and late nights. Yet within 14 days of shooting *McGinty* he still succumbed to a debilitating chill; and the doctor topped off his prescription with a book recommendation: *Two Lifetimes in One—How Never to Be Tired—How to Have Energy to Burn*, by Marie Beynon Ray. If Brander Matthews' *A Study of the Drama* was Sturges' Bible in matters dramaturgical, this book, first published in 1938, helped to crystallise all his thoughts on personal health and happiness. Through chatty chapters entitled 'Shall We Call in a Specialist?', 'What Do You Do Between 5 PM and 11 PM?' and such, Mrs Ray proposed that all tiredness was self-induced, generated by seven 'public enemies'—boredom, worry, a sense of inferiority, fear, oversensitivity, indecision and pusillanimity. The solution lay mostly in extending one's interests, keeping fiendishly busy. Look at Alfred Lunt, the book said—not only a superb actor, but also a *superb cook*, nervously planning a new dish for a supper party while making up backstage. Look at New York's mayor Fiorello La Guardia, or Mrs Roosevelt, or Edward T. Stotesbury—financier, music lover, horse breeder, king of Palm Beach society, active churchman, advocate of prison reform, passionate drummer, and the country's third best-dressed man at the age of 88. 'Every day,' Mrs Ray wrote, 'something hitherto unknown becomes known to someone determined to know it, some heretofore unaccomplished deed is accomplished by someone hell-bent on doing it.' Sturges—a passionate seeker of the 'hitherto unknown', and as hellbent as anyone on earth—swore by the book's pronouncements, and pronounced them in turn to any friend showing signs of fatigue.

He also maintained his own inventions for safe, healthy living. He conceived an 'exercycle', and was photographed riding one for a publicity shot during filming of *Christmas in July*. Some weeks later, on 30 July 1940, with the film in post-production, Sturges had another invention raring to go. 'It is a form of exerciser,' he wrote to Charles Hills, a Chicago firm of patent attorneys, 'in appearance like a rowing machine, in which the momentum you impart to the heavy flywheel hauls you back and stretches you.' He then enumerated its attractions in terms suggesting a mechanical instrument of torture: 'If you do it with one hand it twists your torso. It grinds your stomach against your knees, loosens and lubricates your joints and generally gives you a terrific work-out with comparatively little effort on your part. I am quite certain that it is com-

mercially practical and I am hoping for a basic patent. Please look into the matter for me.' Sturges took the occasion to keep the attorneys posted on his film career—something they seemed hardly to know about—and to plug *The Great McGinty*, due for release in August: 'I have just become a director in pictures, and I am doing all right. My first directorial effort . . . will open in your city very soon and I hope that you will go to see it and enjoy it.'

Charles Hills' office responded with polite professional interest. Their reaction to their client's first feature is not recorded, but we know their reaction to his rowing machine exerciser. They carefully tested its mechanics against existing specimens and sent a four-page letter on 16 September 1940, outlining their results and requesting further information, especially about the operating handle. 'Is the handle in the form of a wheel, or does it just have two arms



The Beautiful Blonde from Bashful Bend:
Sturges with Betty Grable.

which may be engaged by both hands of the operator?' Alas for their diligence, Sturges' own hands were fully occupied with pre-production work on his third feature *The Lady Eve*, and no reply was ever sent. This was the price for 'doing all right'.

Eight months later, on 16 May 1941, the attorneys wrote to chivvy their inventor. Again, it was a bad time to write: shooting on *Sullivan's Travels* had begun nine days earlier, though at least this time Hills received a reply from Sturges' assistant. 'As he is in the midst of shooting a picture, he will make reply just as soon as he can review the matter again.' He never did, though Chicago pursued him for two more years. They wrote on 24 July 1941, when Sturges was hovering between post-production work on *Sullivan's Travels* and a script for *The Palm Beach Story*. They wrote on 23 June 1942: then *The Great Moment* was in post-production; they wrote on 15 February 1943, during post-production on *The Miracle of Morgan's Creek*. They then wisely gave up; the medieval exercise apparatus that stretches, grinds,

loosens and lubricates may have done wonders for Sturges' physique, but it never made any steps towards the commercial market.

At other times the boot was on the other foot: Sturges the inventor raced ahead, only to meet a brick wall. In his restless search to improve the quality of life he conceived, during the 40s, the self-styled 'Sturgephone', complete with its advertising tag—'The Emotionally Efficient Hearing Aid'. In shape this resembled an ordinary telephone, but its function was that of an amplifier for those momentarily tired of the conventional aid fitted into the ear. Exactly how the phone was 'emotionally efficient', or even just efficient, is unclear from the surviving documents, though we can easily chart the invention's erratic progress. First, one Thomas J. Carlson was paid \$5,000 for engineering work on the device. Sturges then approached an engineering company over the manufacture of plastic cases to house his medical marvel; he wanted some of them opaque, he wrote, some transparent, and some coloured. A later letter clarified his desires: 1,000 cases, please, preferably in black. No reply was ever received. Perhaps he was writing to the wrong address, or perhaps in some abandoned warehouse 1,000 unusable black plastic phone cases lie forgotten—one more bizarre legacy from Preston Sturges' fertile mind.

The chief legacy, of course, remains the films. They, like the preceding plays, were inventions of a kind—machines, almost, for producing laughter: and the Sturges who wrote in 1959 about playwriting being 'an instinctive art, like wriggling the ears' was wfully ignoring the hours spent with Brander Matthews, the hours tinkering with plot structure, motives and language that made the machines run so smoothly. Through intricately constructed and worded scripts, Sturges invented his own special universe of tycoons, go-getters, spend-thrifts and riff-raff. He blessed every bartender and shopkeeper with the gift of his own gab, and gave one character, Toto in *The Palm Beach Story*, a unique three-word language far more universal than Esperanto ('Grittinks', 'Yitz', 'Nitz'). He overhauled Hollywood performers to meet his specifications like a mechanic overhauling an engine: star personalities like Joel McCrea, Harold Lloyd and Rudy Vallee; character actors and bit players like William Demarest, Jimmy Conlin, Al Bridge, Frank Moran, Arthur Hoyt, who had previously seemed just part of the scenery. But we should never forget the exercise apparatus, the kiss-proof lipstick, the blinking and wagging traffic lights and company; for without the quirky mind that dreamed them up and tried to push them, however erratically, into reality, the films would simply not exist. ■

The author's thanks are due to the Department of Special Collections, Research Library, University of California at Los Angeles, to Tom Vallance and to Mrs Sandy Sturges.

What was Saved from the Wreckage

JOSEF SKVORECKY

Josef Skvorecký, scriptwriter, novelist and himself the author of a book on the Czechoslovak New Wave (*All the Bright Young Men and Women*), discusses Czechoslovak cinema in the light of a major new book by Peter Hames.

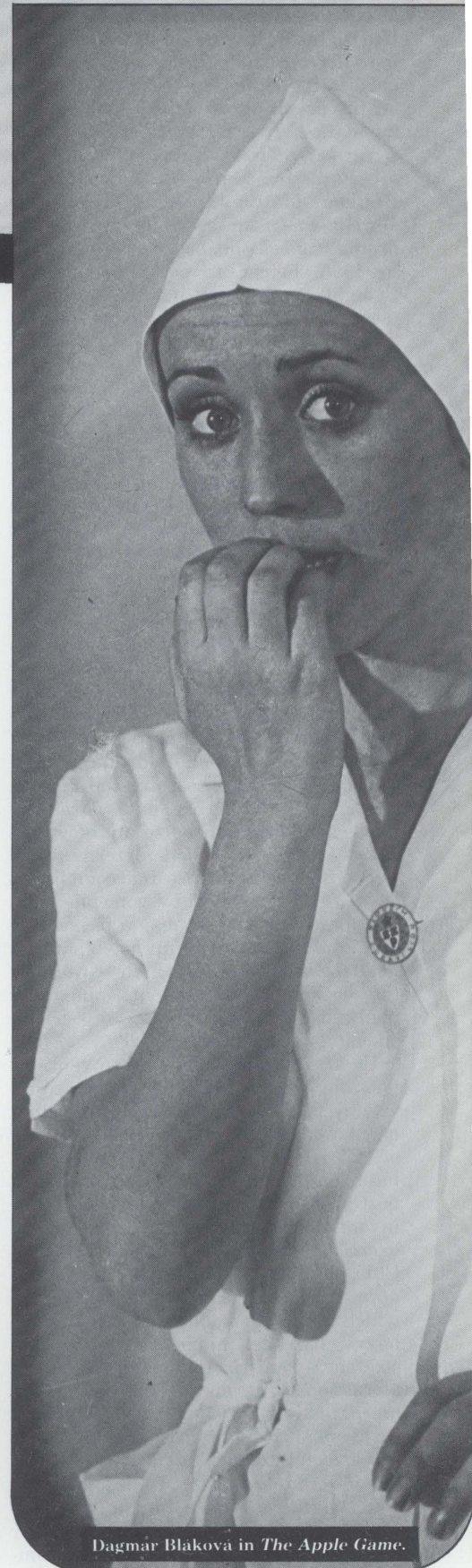
Peter Hames ends his profound and honest book *The Czechoslovak New Wave* on a note of optimism.* First, he asks the rhetorical question: 'Can the Soviet Union afford to leave an erstwhile ally such as Czechoslovakia in its present position where committed Communists are jailed or exiled because of democratic heresies?' Then he answers: 'Perhaps, the post-World War II technocrats who will inherit the Soviet system will find . . . that it is better to have friends rather than vassals.' This is about the only view in the book on which my opinion radically differs from that of its author. Mr Hames' thought reflects the widespread misapprehension which presupposes that a Communist's mind works along the same lines as a western democrat's. To a vintage Party member, however, it has always been clear that Czechoslovakia was never an ally of the Soviet Union but just a part of the Marxist-Leninist 'peace camp' or, to use more accurate western terminology, Moscow's colony: its shackled *territorio libre*. Its 'independence' has always been purely formal, a strategic ploy: a 'limited' sovereignty. Colonies are colonies, they are not allies. Should they try to take their independence at face value they are reminded of the harsh facts by traditional imperialist means. Not neo-imperialist—nineteenth century imperialist. In a system based on absolute obedience, heretics are above enemies on the shooting list. They are not forgiven, unless they demean themselves by a recantation of the heresy. Even then, they remain closely watched.

Therefore, all hopes pinned on the 'technocrats' of Mr Gorbachev's era are

futile. (In a very basic way, Marxism-Leninism has always been a technocratic method of ruling society, not a populist or a democratic one.) Already, clear signs that under Gorbachev everything is as it always has been appear in Czech periodicals. I recently read an inane leading article in a cultural monthly which, among other things, condemned the use of drunkenness as a source of humour in works of art. Clearly, *ex oriente lux*. Reports from Prague tell of another phenomenon: in the pre-Gorbachev days, meetings with Soviet groups coming to Prague to negotiate business, artistic, scientific or other agreements used to last for hours—I don't mean they *dragged* for hours, rather they flowed smoothly on the high spirits of Vodka Stolichnaya. Now they are quick gatherings of unconcentrated men who make frequent journeys to the lavatory, not because of a malfunctioning prostate but because the emergency hip flask can function only in private.

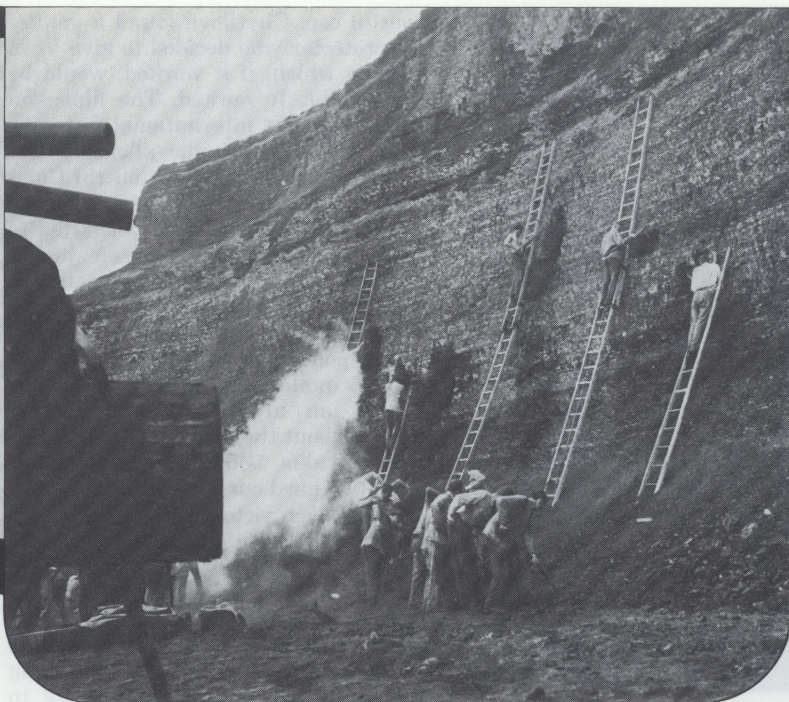
As far as film is concerned, the summer of 1985 brought a major tragedy to the Czechoslovak industry: the official entry sent to the Moscow Film Festival did not pass the pre-selection jury, although the director, comrade Jaroslav Balík, is the bearer of many medals and titles, and an absolutely reliable Party man. But he fell into the same time-trap as Eisenstein, who had to edit out Trotsky from *October* and hurriedly shoot some additional Lenin footage. Balík didn't have the time to do even that. The film, a traditional socialist-realist melodrama concerning efforts to meet some impossible deadline for some sort of building project, ends with the final shot of the tower-like structure, finished in time after all thanks to socialist devotion. Two workers are raising the flag and the manager of the company is climbing a ladder to join them. As he reaches the top he produces—guess what. Because of that object, Soviet viewers of the Gorbachev era were deprived of the pleasure of seeing Mr Balík's *opus alcoholicum*.

So what is really changing under the 'technocrats'?



Dagmar Blakova in *The Apple Game*.

* *The Czechoslovak New Wave* by Peter Hames, University of California Press, \$35.00/£29.75.



Left: Jaromil Jireš' *The Joke*. Right: Eva Pilarová and Vlastimil Brodský in *Crime in the Night Club*, scripted by Josef Skvorecký.

On the other hand, the dialectics of concrete reality give us some optimism. In the late 60s, Mr Hames notes, a new generation was emerging from the famous Film Academy in Prague (FAMU) 'that longed to declare war on everything of the recent past, and to make what they provocatively referred to as "commercial films".' I remember that well: it was, in part, a reaction born out of the constant harping from establishment sources on the alleged inability of 'formalist' and 'art' directors like Chytilová or Němec to make good, craftsmanlike 'filmgoers' movies (*divácké filmy*). Němec at that time planned (and partially realised) a tv film featuring pop-singers, and Schorm intended to bring together the legendary prewar comic duo of George Voskovec (then already an American actor: *Twelve Angry Men*, *The Boston Strangler*) and Jan Werich (of Jasný's *Cassandra Cat*) in a film I was to script that most certainly would not have been anything in the manner of *Daisies* or *The Party and the Guests*. My own two movies with Jiří Menzel, *Crime in the Girls School* and *Crime in the Night Club*, were products of those efforts to prove that 'art' directors can turn out decent 'filmgoers' entertainment.

Then came 1970, and suddenly budding directors saw their dreams come true. Not, however, as they had dreamt them. They found themselves faced with overwhelming official demands for the Communist variety of the commercial movie: for comedies without bite, melodramatic tearjerkers about blind girls, espionage thrillers of James Bondian political complexity and, of course, the traditional socialist-realist pseudo-dramas where mild 'criticism' and insubstantial 'daring' (usually female nudity) were now permitted. Not that some products of this socialist 'commercialism' were not quite good as such things go (*Run, Waiter, Run*, for

instance), but there is something wrong with a cinema which once became famous for its soul-searching examinations of the real issues of Czechoslovak society and its genuinely daring formal experiments, and now thrives on *dějà vu* screwball comedies and on 'critical' looks at the problems of obesity. It is like a slave society reflecting itself only in farces about the merry-making darkies, and in tragedies about the ill-effects of laziness among field hands.

The lack of substance of the current production does not go unnoticed in the official film journal. An article by John Radek in *Film and Times* (No 5, 1980) pretends puzzlement over the fact that contemporary Czech comedies seem so divorced from any recognisable reality, and finds the answer in the directors' 'fear of reality'. Cynically speaking, the Czech film-makers have good reason to 'fear reality', when they remember what happened to the men and women of the New Wave who were fearless. The argument of the establishment critic is a vintage Communist one, and reminds me of times under Stalin when Soviet literature was at its lowest, with good writers in camps or silenced, so that even the literary establishment had to acknowledge the absence of good work. Whom did the establishment find responsible? The editors. The critics lambasted them for failing to discover new talents.

So the yearning for commercialism of this sort soon left the students of FAMU, and instead of looking to the future, they now again look to the past. Witness to this is not some underground observer in a *samizdat* publication but one of the leading Stalinists in the industry, the director Antonín Kachlík. Writing in *Film and Times* in 1981, he harangues the students of FAMU for their unceasing demands that the school's curriculum be changed to a *status quo ante* the Soviet Invasion. For, he claims, the 'legend' of

the 60s as a 'Golden Age' of the Czech cinema stubbornly persists in the classrooms of the school.

Legends, especially those anchored in easily verifiable facts, are notoriously hard to kill. So there is hope.

Mr Hames sees a glimmer of this hope in what he terms a new 'thaw', which cautiously asserted itself in 1976-77 and haltingly continues to the present. Those years saw the return to the studios, after an absence of five or six years, of such leading figures as Jiří Menzel (*Closely Watched Trains*, *Capricious Summer*), Věra Chytilová (*Daisies*, *The Fruit of Paradise*), František Vlácil (*Markéta Lazarová*) and Dušan Hanák (322). Mr Hames offers sensitive analyses of such products of the limited 'thaw' as Menzel's *Seclusion Near a Forest* (1976), Chytilová's *The Apple Game* (1976), Vlácil's *Shadows of a Hot Summer* (1977) or Hanák's *Rose-Tinted Dreams* (1976). The reader is made to feel that these new works of the old masters are not something they should be ashamed of. The film-makers had lost nothing of their technical brilliance, and even in the deadening conditions of the 1970s they displayed a spirit of criticism—however limited—rather than of confusion.

These films are certainly in many respects as good as anything to be seen these days on the screen anywhere in the world. But, to me, they only confirm the validity of an observation by Jaromil Jireš (*The Joke*) in a 1969 interview: 'The only kind of courage that exists [in a totalitarian society] is "tolerated" courage. You are always restricted to filming those things which are permitted.' Menzel's *Seclusion Near a Forest* is critical of status symbol seeking and of the universal weekend escapism to summer cottages. Menzel, being the competent artist that he is, gives the comedy a compelling sense of reality. But let us not forget that the target is an



Seclusion Near a Forest.

official one, recommended in the spirit of hypocrisy. Escape 'from it all' (i.e. from social and political involvement) is labelled a 'petit-bourgeois remnant of the past' and as such verbally condemned. In actual fact, it is encouraged by the government; the rulers of the Communist Party prefer a nation that, at weekends, removes itself to the individual privacies of country cottages, to a nation that, as in the times of Dubček, spent weekends in unsanctioned demonstrations and political gatherings. Attacking this *nihil obstat* target really helps to legitimise the establishment's claims that socialist realism encourages criticism, not conformity. Just let Menzel—or any other film-maker—try to tackle other social problems, such as the universal Janus face of contemporary 'realsozialist' society, and see what happens.

Another permitted target, sexual irresponsibility, gave Věra Chytilová her pretext for making *The Apple Game*. As for Vlácil's *Shadows of a Hot Summer*, it is not only the film's anti-fascism that enabled Vlácil to shoot the movie; it is also, and mainly, the circumstance that the fascists in the film are represented by Bandera's Ukrainian guerrillas, who tried in 1947 to fight their way through Czechoslovakia to the west. To describe these men unequivocally as 'fascists' is at least controversial—but, of course, in Czechoslovakia it is the official label. It goes to Mr Hames' credit that he is aware of all this. Vlácil, he writes, dealt with the historical incident 'in such a generalised manner that it is open to wide interpretation.' I have my doubts, however, about the actual width of the interpretation in the mind of the ordinary moviegoer, particularly in the west.

For me, these and other good films of the era of the 'Biafra of the mind' (Aragon) only confirm the old observation that everything that is of worth in the evil empire of the Communists results

not from the Party's wisdom and benevolence, but from either the cunning of the artists or the perseverance with which they push certain ideas until the Party, for various reasons, gives in and adopts those ideas, and often those who hold them, for its own. This happens especially if such men can be forced to recant, as was the case with Menzel and his main supplier of scripts, the writer Bohumil Hrabal (*Closely Watched Trains, Larks on a Thread, Cutting It Short*, etc).

What has actually been achieved by the 'mini-thaw' since the mid-70s is mostly what Jaroslav Hašek (*The Good Soldier Schweik*) would call 'a mild progress within the boundaries of the law.' To criticise the Party or the police remains firmly taboo, and so does any non-selective examination of contemporary life. But you can now show nudity on the screen or poke fun at silly women who yearn for fashions bought by émigré relatives at Saks Fifth Avenue.

Sometimes, a good film owes its existence to backstage conspiracies: *The Apple Game* is clearly a triumph of the director's cunning and intrigue. The film was made not by the Feature Film Studios but by the Short Film Department, which had never before made features. The head of Short Film was, at that time, a well-known and intelligent officer of the Secret Police who decided to engage in a little gamble. My hypothesis (see my *Jiří Menzel and the History of the Closely Watched Trains*, 1982), which is supported by extensive internal evidence and whose essential validity has recently been confirmed to me by a film critic on a trip to the West, is as follows. Chytilová, as Mr Hames writes, indeed 'has personal enemies within the industry.' She is a woman; moreover an exceptionally talented one. The male-dominated Communist Party, and the industry which, after 1968, became dominated by untalented men, is allergic to such a thing. In the clever and

powerful cop, Chytilová found a gentleman protector who decided to give Vera a chance which, if it worked, would be to his credit. It worked. The film won several prizes at international festivals. The Angries of Barrandov allegedly sent a letter of protest to the Central Committee of the Party warning that if people like Chytilová were permitted to spread their formalist poison again, we would soon have another counter-revolution. But in the end the Angries were reduced to grumbling, and Věra and her policeman won—not because of the film's quality, but because it could be used as an argument in disproving rumours about the 'cultural cemetery' of Czechoslovakia (Böll), and because it brought in hard currency cash.

Like all such victories, this also was a Pyrrhic one. Those one-time innovators who are permitted to work again are permitted to do precisely no more than what is permitted. The spirit of the movement is gone; there is no longer a movement, just a few of the bright young men and women of the 60s trying to salvage at least something from the Golden Age. They are supported by the sympathies of the cinemagoers, but they are also closely, very closely watched.

The strength, liveliness and influence of the New Wave that spread through all socialist states in Eastern Europe was precisely in the fact that it was a collective enterprise of varied individuals, united not by a common and binding ideology but by a shared resentment of the political *status quo*. (Emir Kusturica, the Yugoslav director of *When Father Was Away on Business*, incidentally, studied at FAMU at the time of the 'legend'.) It produced no manifestos except the wish to tell the truth about Czechoslovak society as the individual artists saw it, and to tell that truth in a manner best suited to their individual talents. In analysing this complex artistic-social phenomenon, Mr Hames illuminates for the western reader an important episode in modern film history that has already faded from the awareness of younger western generations: four students signed up for my course in East European Cinema a few years ago, whereas dozens registered for a Contemporary German Film course. He manages to convey the remarkable aesthetic span of the films: from the 'cruel' realism of the Forman school, to the meditative narrative of Evald Schorm, the surreal works of Jan Němec, the brilliant experimentalism of Chytilová, all the way to the wild improvisations of Juraj Jakubisko.

He also demonstrates the irrelevance of western debates about the 'progressive' versus 'reactionary' merits of 'realism' versus 'non-realism'. 'Both forms proved to be radical and controversial within the existing production context,' writes Mr Hames. 'It was not technique that worried the authorities in the case of Forman and Schorm but the messages contained within their "realist" format. However, it was technique in the case of Chytilová and a

mixture of both technique and content in the case of Némec.' Ideological permutations like Luc Moullet's attack on Némec's *Diamonds of the Night* in *Cahiers du Cinéma*, which branded the film's aesthetic 'reactionary' and 'deprived of all social and human value', or Godard's ridiculous film *Pravda*, concocted, to the oppressive post-Invasion establishment's delight, in a few days of post-factum 'experience' in 1969 and linking the work of Chytilová to—of all people—Darryl F. Zanuck, these samples of Leninist orthodoxy 'associated [themselves] with the most conservative elements in Czechoslovak culture,' (Hames). The fact confirms another old truism, namely that there is not much difference between the views of the extreme left and the extreme right, between western ultra-radicals and Communist ultra-Stalinists.

Mr Hames' descriptions of the marvelously ageless films are accurate and exhaustive, so that an eye-witness like myself cannot add much, except a footnote here and there. Papoušek's *Black Peter*, from which Forman's movie was made, was not a short story but a novel. In *Saddled with Five Girls*, Schorm did not use professional actors, unless one considers the opera star cast in one of the main roles a professional actor. Those are the only inaccuracies I was able to detect. Mr Hames writes a lot about Kafka and his influence on the film-making of the 1960s, and I have no quarrel with the way he sees this—it

only brings to my mind several Kafkaesque circumstances. Isn't it Kafkaesque that the New Wave director Zbyněk Brynych (*The Fifth Horseman Is Fear*), who in 1970 filmed Kafka's *Amerika* in West Germany, returned to Prague only to shoot a eulogy to the humaneness of Husák's police in *The Night of the Orange Fires*? And Juraj Jakubisko? His *See You in Hell, Fellows!* was banned so savagely that he was not even allowed to edit it (this was done, in his absence, by Italian editors in Rome), for which wise banning he publicly thanked the government at the Venice Festival in the Orwellian year of 1984.

As I said earlier, the only aspect of Mr Hames' book with which I disagree is his optimistic conclusion. I am, unfortunately, a pessimist: the more so that instead of the senile oldsters we now have in the Kremlin a youngish toughie. The 'mini-thaw' of the second half of the 70s is deceptive. No new school, no new movement is emerging on the Barrandov hill. Of course, there are (mostly in the works by the permitted survivors of the 60s) subtle hints to indicate to the viewers that the film is not entirely what it purports to be. Mr Hames recognises them well. The casting of actors and non-actors associated with the condemned ideological abominations of the New Wave is one. A still from *Closely Watched Trains* hanging on the wall in a scene in Chytilová's *Calamity* is another. There are indi-

vidual, encoded messages, signals to the initiated in the works of other directors: outside the borders of the country, however, such private language is practically incomprehensible. When the opera star Emma Destinnová in Jiří Krejčík's *The Divine Emma* refuses to become an informer for the old Austro-Hungarian police there is tremendous applause in Prague cinemas; not, however, in the theatres of the West. There is similar applause when, in Otakar Vávra's recent *Komenský*, Jan Amos Comenius, the seventeenth century pedagogue and philosopher, condemns the crime of forcing the best brains in the country into exile just because they refused to turn Catholic. These are old, known tricks of silenced art, courageous and pitiful. They do not create movements, they do not bring about refreshing new approaches, they do not lead to great art.

But, sometimes, they can be deeply moving. In *Wind in the Pocket*, a 1982 feature directed by Jaroslav Soukup, two young workers are standing on an overpass under which a train is driving westward. One of the boys has an aunt in Paris, but his applications for an exit visa to visit her have been systematically turned down. 'See?' he musingly addresses his comrade. 'The Paris express! In ten hours they will be in Paris. And my aunt lives in the Rue de la Liberté, number one...'

A coded message. In this case, I think, the western viewer needs no help to decode it. ■

The Museum of Modern Art, New York

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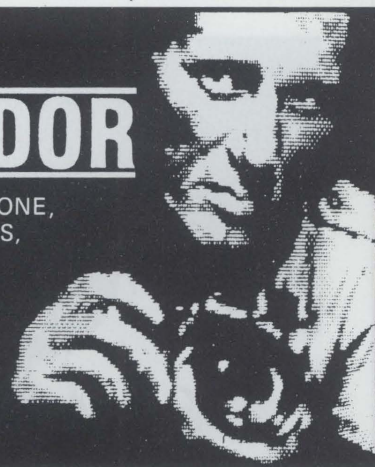
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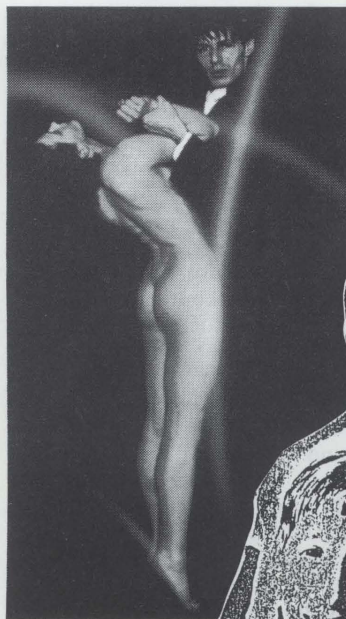
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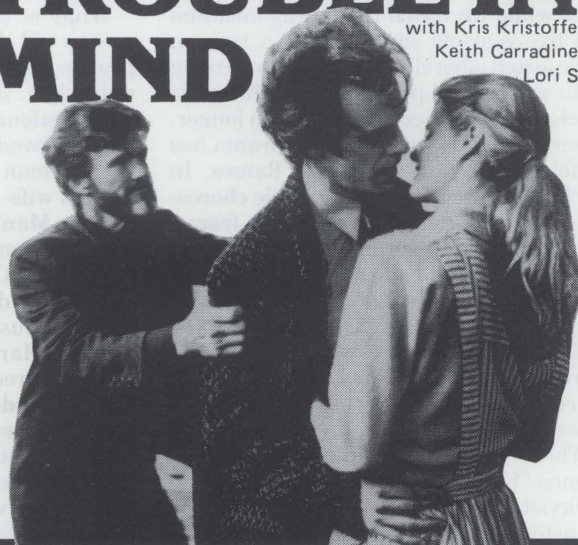
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OCT · ONWARDS



The Sacrifice: Erland Josephson (Alexander), Sven Wollter (Victor).

Ahead of us?

The Sacrifice/Mark Le Fanu

Whatever the difficulties of meaning with *The Sacrifice* (Artificial Eye), Andrei Tarkovsky's latest film, it is impossible not to be struck by its elegance and formal intensity. The mise en scène has the concentrated clarity of great world cinema. Two sequences in particular are destined to be talked about: the opening scene, where the camera stands back for about six minutes while we watch the protagonist and his five-year-old son planting a tree on a deserted shoreline, before conversing with a bicycling postman; and the next-to-closing sequence, possibly even longer, where the house in which the drama has unfolded goes up fiercely in flames. In each of these scenes a formidable choreography is taking place within the frame, requiring split-second co-ordination between the movement of the camera and the movement of the actors. The sequences seem magically to combine the utmost austerity with the utmost baroque ingenuity. They are clearly the work of an artist at the height of his powers.

These then are the really virtuoso scenes; but the camerawork (by Sven Nykvist), editing and general placement of actors throughout the film are consistently inventive and pleasurable. Tarkovsky makes great play, as always, with mirrors and reflections to heighten the drama's dreamlike otherworldliness, producing sudden surprising juxtapositions and comparisons. What, for instance, is the meaning of the mysterious print of a painting by Leonardo hanging on the wall in the upstairs sitting-room? In so far as we can get a clue, it emerges in the subtle pull of camera focus which

shows us now the painting itself (the Virgin surrounded by three gift-bearing kings), now the grim faces of the two men, Alexander and Otto, looking at it, reflected in its protective glass covering. The emotions here are difficult to put into words accurately, but they perhaps have something to do with an irreducible mixture of anguish and joy which forms the film's spiritual background.

What is the sacrifice which the title speaks of? A nuclear war between the powers looks as if it is going to be unleashed. Jet aeroplanes fly low, and with deafening noise, over the deserted part of Sweden where the distinguished theatre man Alexander lives with his exactress wife Adelaide, infant son Gossen ('Little Man') and daughter Marta. In addition there are the servant Julia and neighbours Otto (the bicycling postman), Victor, a doctor (perhaps Adelaide's lover), plus a mysterious Icelandic woman, Maria.

At a precise moment of the long, light-filtered summer night, Alexander (Erland Josephson) makes a private vow to God that if they can all only live through the unendurable hours until dawn, he will break off his family ties, and live henceforth in silence and solitude. There is a subsequent semi-drunken, semi-hysterical episode involving the Icelandic woman (a sort of holy adultery, urged on by Otto); but the long and the short of the matter is that he—and they—somehow or other do succeed in getting through the night without disaster. So that by the time morning comes the sacrifice is ready to be put into effect.

Its actual form, however, takes a

dramatic twist that has not been specifically formulated in the vow. Alexander lures his family off on a walk to the shoreline, and then behind their backs, so to speak, sets fire, in a blazing holocaust, to his ('their') house and possessions. The horrified arrival back on the scene of his loved ones—along with Alexander's mad bounding around as he attempts to explain, and yet not explain—forms the substance of the final great 'virtuoso' scene alluded to.

I apologise for giving more of the plot than reviews usually allow; but if there is something consistently puzzling, 'indecipherable', about the film, it is the significance of the central act of sacrifice. We could put it like this: the unilateral vow of Alexander brings consequences that are not only painful for him, but painful (maybe far more so) for family, friends, dependants. According to how one judges the morality of such gestures—whether one thinks they are 'gestures', or moral actions—the film will be lucid or opaque.

A further difficulty that one can't avoid encountering lies in the film's slowness. To a certain extent these matters are subjective, responding to the comfort—or at any event, lack of discomfort—of the viewing conditions. But in Tarkovsky for a long time now there has been an issue about the way the drama unfolds itself. Tarkovsky's films proceed at their own pace, which is not necessarily the pace audiences are used to. In *The Sacrifice* this is partly made up for by the tightness of the unities. The film is shot in one location; it starts on a clear summer morning (the morning of Alexander's birthday), ending—on its discreet mixture of catastrophe and hope—some twenty-four hours later.

Thus it is not so much the climax that is the problem, as the scenes involving the night and the early hours of morning. The conversations here are extensive in themselves, but more than this: they have a kind of privacy, a self-enclosedness, that at times appears to be only marginally connected to the development of the story. The scene where Otto, before dropping down in a swoon, recounts the tale of the woman whose dead son turned up alive in a contemporary photograph is an example of this free-wheeling 'anecdoteage'. Another might be the parable of the ruining of his mother's garden with which Alexander regales Maria before asking her, successfully, to sleep with him. Of course all drama relies on extraneous matter—dreams, velleities, unforeseen bouts of conversation—to help it along and give it substance. But the question is here whether the anecdotes resonate centrally. Whether, that is, they help provide the overall architecture (that sense of intense relatedness between the different separate parts) which is integral to truly great art.

The viewer pitches his demands at the highest possible level, because

Tarkovsky, of all contemporary filmmakers, deserves to be treated so. He is undoubtedly one of the great spiritual presences. Rilke at the turn of the century used to speak of his own two artistic masters, Rodin and Cézanne, as being, somehow, 'ahead of us'. And I think this is what one obscurely senses about the figure of the lonely Russian exile. Thus the difficulties of his art can be met without peevishness or impatience, because his importance exceeds the limits of his 'role'. He 'stands for' something we

are in need of, even if we can't name it precisely.

Here, in *The Sacrifice*, we have to judge the nobility of Alexander's decision, without ever knowing whether he is mad, or drunk, or truly inspired by God. The film has a terrible sincerity, but it is not didactic. It avoids being summed up by a single viewing (by a single review). One has to return to it, and listen for its complex vibrations. What is Tarkovsky saying to us? Is it vital, or not vital, that we hear? □

The honourable dead

The Mission/Gavin Millar

In the title lies the not so difficult clue to Roland Joffé's interests. *The Killing Fields* might equally well have been called *The Mission*. It was, more than anything else, the quest of an ordinary man with an extraordinary spirit. Dith Pran was ordinary only in the sense that he was undistinguished by worldly standards of wealth, eminence or role. His distinction lay in the exemplary qualities of courage, loyalty, affection and selflessness that he displayed. Everyone who came into contact with him was not only affected but somehow ennobled by the experience, not least Sydney Schanberg. His mission, and Schanberg's too, started out by being, willy-nilly, a military one, and became, in the end, a spiritual one.

In a sense the South American film—*The Mission* (Columbia-Cannon-Warner)—turns the movement on its head. What starts out as a spiritual mission becomes, willy-nilly, a military one. The two heroes, Father Gabriel and Don Rodrigo Mendoza, define themselves and their faith in the end by either fighting or not fighting to defend it. It seems clear that it is those qualities—the values for which you will die rather than live in shame—that are the object of Joffé's concern. His attachment to them, or at least to teasing out in various protagonists what they might be, is what moves his audiences. It is an accidental reflection that some of his heroes choose to fight and some do not. I don't believe we are meant to weigh the fighter, Mendoza, in the balance against the pacifist Gabriel, and find him wanting. Neither, after all, survives in the body. The important thing is, as the envoi has it, that history ensures, with enduring irony, that the honourable dead survive the shameful living.

It is an old, old story, but Joffé and his screenwriter Robert Bolt make a brave new assault on it and for the most part honourably succeed. The true events occur in the Spanish and Portuguese possessions in South America in the middle of the eighteenth century. Jesuit missions threaten by their economic as much as spiritual success to undermine

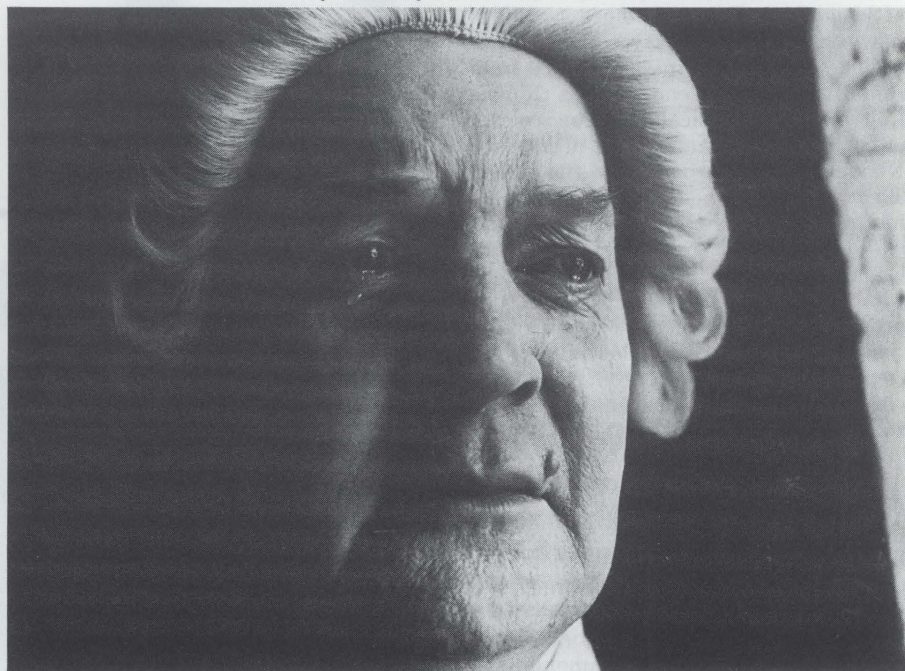
the authority not only of the colonial empires, but equally of the central Roman church. More particularly, they look like souring the delicately uneasy relationship between Church and States, in which the former turns a blind eye, in return for nominal allegiance, to the sinful depredations of the latter, not least their slave-trading. A papal nuncio, Altamirano (Ray McAnally) is dispatched to adjudicate between the antagonists: the colonial powers who want to see the missions closed; and the Jesuits. Carefully weighing the shorter glories of the missions against the longer interests of the Holy Roman Church and Empire, the nuncio finds, regretfully, for the European powers. The Indians cannot believe that God has changed his mind. They decide to fight for what they have made into a brave new world, and some if not all the priests join in the doomed enterprise.

One who joins is Mendoza, a former slave-trader himself, rescued from sin and converted by Father Gabriel, who

himself will not fight. Robert De Niro and Jeremy Irons, as Mendoza and Gabriel, are the centre of the character battle. But first the violent Mendoza expiates his lifetime's misdeeds in a penance to the mission on the high plateau. He drags the burden of his sins, literally, in a net behind him, a great ball of armour and weapons, the tokens of his former life, upstream, through jungle, across mountain and, agonisingly, up the vertical face of a cataract. It is the most spectacular of many dazzling sequences. It is crowned by the moment when the distraught and exhausted penitent hauls his burden to the feet of the Indians who were once his victims and sees them absolve him by cutting not his throat as they first threaten, but the rope that binds him to the net, sending his torture crashing hundreds of feet to the river bed below.

At these moments, and there are several of them, Joffé is well in command of his emotional commitments. It has to be said of course that he has the world's most powerful screen actor lending a hand. De Niro is simply a lap ahead; but then, part of the good director's armoury is persuading the best people to work for him. Money alone won't do it, and Joffé rightly enjoys his confidence. But perhaps the best performance, since it is the most difficult, is Ray McAnally's, which will come as a surprise only to those who haven't been paying attention for years. Altamirano is a subtle prelate, and McAnally does the complicated thing superbly: convey honest doubt, decent confusion, ultimate compromise, tragic self-awareness. He's an attractive figure who makes the wrong decision. We never question that his doubt was honest, nor that the outcome was deeply suspect. There is evidence possibly that the structure, in

The Mission: Ray McAnally (Altamirano). Photo: David Appleby.



which his report to the Pope forms the narrative envelope, incorporating flashbacks, was arrived at rather late in the proceedings. It's a small sense of awkwardness and complexity that occasionally conflicts with the clear directness of the tone, but it is not damaging. At least it enables McAnally to address us with all the ironic texture of the most advanced intelligence on display—Altamirano's—and to confront us, the audience, with a final bold post-credits accusatory glare.

But why go back to the middle of the eighteenth century for a moral history lesson? Joffé and Bolt (and David Putnam and Fernando Ghia, the co-producers) have clearly felt the pressing lessons. Fortunately Joffé has learnt a light touch here in the analogy department. Only the piercing honesty of our world-class cinematographer Chris Menges occasionally burns an image right through its housing and lands it with a jolt on our doorstep: a heap of naked wet babies stacked in the mud awaiting the blade; the bemused flight of the poor, the innocent, the betrayed down the centuries. □

Actors acting

Mona Lisa/John Pym

A bunch of chrysanthemums is hurled at a slammed front door, smartly followed by a dustbin. Enraged by the wife who wants rid of him, George, an amiable small-time Cockney crook, turns on the gathered crowd. Since he's been in prison, for seven years, on someone else's behalf, the neighbourhood has been colonised by West Indians. George looks for a face to punch. A slice of old-style working-class drama? Well, yes, in a way, but then—in this opening sequence of *Mona Lisa* (Palace)—comes a whiff of new-style British fantasy.

George (Bob Hoskins) is plucked from the affray by his friend Thomas (Robbie Coltrane), a whimsical deadpan Scot, an entrepreneur-mechanic with a taste for whodunits. At the bottom of the street, Thomas has parked George's lovingly mothballed cream-coloured Jag, all walnut and maroon leather. This is George's real home: a sentimental symbol for his sentimental values, a proud British car, built before the invention of Maltese pimps or heroin or child sex, when crooks were honest and chipper, when delivery dates meant something and debts were honoured.

The London into which George re-immerses himself is, of course, overflowing with nastiness. Dinny Mortwell (Michael Caine, standing out of the limelight but not missing a moment), the vice baron for whom George took the rap, won't really see George right, though he does give him a job, of sorts, chauffeuring Simone, a diamond-hard

top-bracket prostitute. Waiting dutifully in the foyer of a smart hotel, in the suit in which he emerged from prison, George discovers that service these days is strictly conditional. Cruising in the Jag with Simone, who regularly searches the infernal King's Cross meat-rack for that something which is the film's mystery, George observes the human debris, half incredulously: 'I've got a girl that age.'

The first attraction of *Mona Lisa*, directed by Neil Jordan, from a script by him and David Leland, is its immediate confidence and economy. Jordan and his editor Lesley Walker have a sure sense of proportion. To take a small example: the potentially scene-stealing white rabbit which George buys in order to remind Mortwell of his obligation. It is the subject of two comic lines (no more and neither overstated) and then is sent on its way; it is re-introduced at the climax (improbably, but that doesn't matter) and then allowed a telling final appearance beside Mortwell's blood-stained corpse. Exactly right.

Dead time is banished; dialogue counts, all the time; and an occasional hard-bitten line smacks home with transatlantic weight (Simone, in her flat, chilly, Liverpool voice, on the ponce who humiliated her: 'An animal born in a butcher's shop'). The locations, from off-season Brighton to Mortwell's Blackheath mansion with its studiously rambling English garden, have a cinematic freshness which even a comparable up-to-the-minute TV series such as the BBC's accomplished *Big Deal* cannot hope to match. The production design is by Jamie Leonard, the camerawork by Roger Pratt; and it is to the credit of both that the movie's disparate elements—

the fantastical interior of Thomas' Aladdin's cave, with its Japanese food sculptures and illuminated madonnas; the sumptuous location sequences in hotel foyers and saloons—seem all of a piece. The film has no false modesty about its size; it's right, like that of a provincial French mystery by Chabrol.

The Soho clip-joints into which George doggedly ventures looking for Simone's lost friend Cathy are as one imagines them (sulky hostesses, flat champagne, a cup of tea being brewed behind a bead curtain); and Jordan brings a touch of dry humour (a marching column of second-division Bluebell Girls) to the sequence in the upmarket revuebar in which George finally says his piece to the fork-tongued Mortwell. In the small parts, only perhaps the Arab Raschid, one of Simone's regular clients, and the elderly gentleman with the surgeon's gloves who abuses Cathy to a duet from *Madame Butterfly* hint at caricature; but even they have lifeliving lines which make one pleasantly ironical, for a moment, and the other genuinely and displeasingly cruel.

The story—which takes its title from Nat 'King' Cole's silky song ('... or are you just a cold and lonely work of art?')—has seen service. George falls for Simone, his 'tall, thin, black tart' ('Too many t's,' Thomas comments, as George tries to fit her into a whodunit of his own devising); but Simone's heart belongs to the drug-addicted Cathy and she inevitably lets George down—though she does release him from his adoration, thus sealing her doom, by killing Mortwell and the butcher's shop ponce.

If this was all, then there would not perhaps be much to go on about. *Mona Lisa*, however, is buoyed by two notably

Mona Lisa: Bob Hoskins (George), Cathy Tyson (Simone).



assured and sustained performances. Cathy Tyson plays Simone as a girl purged of self-pity, grown old and watchful and unfeeling long before her time: her angular face, her whole bearing in fact, has a hard edge which she does nothing to soften. Miss Tyson has a slight, boyish build, and her awkward designer clothes—every outfit announcing her profession—accentuate her inescapable bind. Bob Hoskins, for whom Jordan created the part of George, is the perfect sparrowlike foil.

George has an entertainer's not a point-scorer's wit. It protects him; without it, he might have been reduced to self-deprecation. Hoskins relishes the role and his relish is infectious. George can head-butt a real villain to the deck of Brighton Pier (though this requires a ludicrous bunny hop to gain the height) and he can gallantly put up an arm to take the razor slash intended for a lady's face: but he makes little of this, it's part of what he has picked up along the way. Once, as Simone is about to keep yet another appointment, George impulsively licks a finger and puts to rights two strands of her hair; he then straightens her clothes, a father sending his daughter on the first date she cares about. George may be something of a self-parodying Cockney sentimentalist, but he has, too, that plain old-fashioned likeability which wins audience hearts and fills cinemas. □

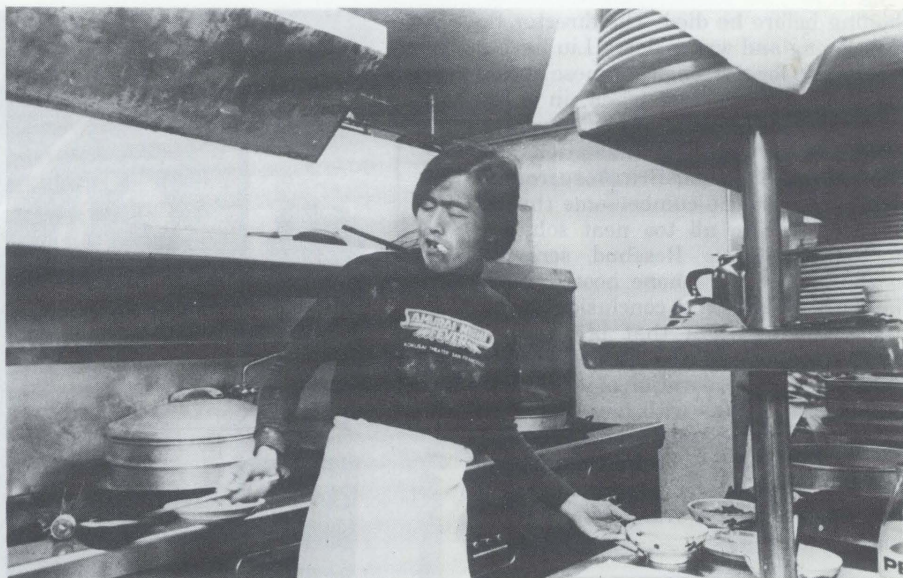
In Chinatown

Chan Is Missing
& *Ping Pong*

Sean French

With *Dim Sum*, these two films, and an impending screen version of Timothy Mo's novel *Sour Sweet*, a new cinematic genre is emerging—the 'Chinatown' film, it could be called. In this context, it's amusing to recall Robert Towne's script for Polanski's film of that name with its portentous last line, 'Forget it, Jake. It's Chinatown.' This was Chinatown seen from the outside, representing everything that was chaotic, threatening and incomprehensible. *Chan Is Missing* (Mainline) and *Ping Pong* (Channel 4) are both thrillers as well and cover the same ground in similar style, but this time the view is from the inside, provided by Anglo-Chinese or Chinese-American writers and directors. The effect is startlingly different though the conclusion is oddly similar.

Chan Is Missing, made in 1981 and the first feature by Wayne Wang, director of *Dim Sum*, is a model example of how to make the best of a small budget (in this case the almost inconceivably low sum of \$20,000). It's about two Chinese taxi drivers who work in San Francisco's Chinatown. Their partner,



Chan Is Missing: Peter Wang (Henry).

Chan Hung, has disappeared while en route to deliver the \$2,000 that will secure them a licence for their taxi firm. Jo, the podgy, cheerful, slightly seedy senior figure, starts to track down their errant partner and the film follows the duo's shambling progress as they gain the odd clue but little real understanding.

They encounter a variety of characters along the way, short on clues but long on theories about Chinese Americans. Chan had last been spotted in a trivial road accident. Because of what an Americanised Chinese woman defines as cross-cultural misunderstanding, Chan, though innocent, admitted his guilt and then disappeared. Other representative figures include a disgruntled cook, who drinks milk, swears and makes sweet and sour pork for tourists, a social worker-cum-entrepreneur who is reconciling the Chinese and American ways of life by manufacturing apple pie from a Chinese recipe. The more people they meet who knew Chan, the less they understand him. Some describe him as a confused, simple man, others as a technical genius. Chan may have skipped with the money, he may have returned to China, he may have been caught up in the feuds between the red Chinese and Taiwanese factions. He may be dead.

Chan Is Missing has a true film noir plot but of the modernist variety, in the footsteps of Antonioni, Altman and *Chinatown* itself. Chan is not found, the mystery is never solved or even properly identified. Wayne Wang has a sure touch for American film conventions, and he (along with his co-writers Isaac Cronin and Terrel Seltzer) deftly plays them off against his Chinese subject matter. Jo and his truculent, foul-mouthed sidekick Steve track down one potential witness to his hotel room. After the occupant refuses to admit them, the two amateur detectives fall into the police pose preparatory to kicking the door down, familiar from a thousand TV dramas.

Then they shrug, laugh and walk away. It's a marvellous moment, funny, lightly played, but also highly perceptive about the genre, and the film is full of similar touches.

Towards the end of the film, Jo announces in a voiceover that 'if this were a TV movie, an important clue would now pop up and clarify everything.' No such clue appears. Instead Jo explains that the search for such neat coherence is a Western trait. For those who can 'think Chinese' what is not there becomes as meaningful as what is. It then becomes possible to accept that Chan disappeared without a reason. Wang's adaptation of the hackneyed thriller conventions to Chinese cultural terms works with immense power.

Indeed, the whole of *Chan Is Missing*, impressively photographed in black and white by Michael Chin, funny and fast moving, crackles with the excitement of a new director tackling a new, exciting subject. The intimate glimpses of Chinese life and characters are of course interesting, but Wang sees them with an irony and intelligence that gives us far more than a puncturing of old stereotypes. His actors also are outstanding. Wood Moy, as Jo, is a genial narrator who gradually becomes far more imposing. Marc Hayashi's Steve is a fine comic performance, an Oriental De Niro, cursing his partner and the Chinese wisdom he offers.

Ping Pong, a Channel 4 film, does for London what *Chan Is Missing* did for San Francisco and suffers in comparison. Wealthy Chinese businessman Sam Wong is found dead in a phone booth with a large quantity of loose change. The thoroughly Anglicised solicitor Elaine Hoi (ably played by the newcomer Lucy Sheen) is assigned by her firm to execute a will she can't even read. She becomes obsessed with the wranglings of Wong's family over the restaurants he owned and also attempts to solve the mystery of whom Wong was

phoning before he died. The director Po Chih Leong and writer Jerry Liu have a shrewd eye for the Anglo-Chinese milieu and *Ping Pong* is best when, in a *My Beautiful Laundrette* sort of way, it shows the varying accommodations the Chinese make to their British surroundings. However, the cumbersome thriller plot provides an all too neat solution, an ideogrammatic Rosebud scrawled on the side of the phone booth. Oddly enough, though, the conclusion is far less satisfying than that of *Chan Is Missing*, a concession to the thriller form rather than an exploration of it. It's easy to damn *Ping Pong* with faint praise: it makes some good points and takes an interesting look at Anglo-Chinese life. What it lacks is the impudent delight with which Wayne Wang has invaded this new territory. □

Pound of flesh

Sugarbaby

Jill Forbes

Is it because she is fat that Marianne (Marianne Sägebrect) is a morgue attendant? To be sure, 'someone has to do it', but it is often the case that people of socially unacceptable dimensions tend to have socially unmentionable jobs. Is it because of her size that when she is not laying out disease-wasted corpses Marianne leads a life as narrow as her girth is broad? After work, which clearly offers little in the way of social interchange, she often goes swimming, her bulk floating like a becalmed whale on the glass surface of the pool. But otherwise she travels home on the subway, climbs into bed, turns on the telly and stuffs herself with sweets. A textbook sugarbaby, straight out of Suzy Orbach. But then her life is changed. She falls madly, crazily in love with the young, blonde, handsome driver of one of the underground trains, glimpsed by chance when he emerges from his cab to survey the platform. Marianne is smitten; thereafter her purpose and mission is to seduce Driver Huber (Eisi Gulp).

This comic, not to say pathetic, situation is treated with mischievous wit by Percy Adlon and organised like a romantic comedy of the silent era. Episode one: 'Love at First Sight'. Episode two: 'The Seduction': Marianne takes leave of absence from work, briskly informing her grudging male supervisor that she has not had a holiday for more than a year. Her time thus freed, she devotes herself with systematic application to three objectives—identifying the driver and contriving a meeting; dressing herself in an appropriately seductive fashion; turning her flat into a love nest worthy of the popular press, to receive the prince when objectives one and two have been realised. This episode is a



Sugarbaby: Marianne Sägebrect and Eisi Gulp.

deliciously observed comedy. Marianne taking delivery of a double mattress; Marianne enquiring whether certain kinds of French knickers come in her size; Marianne, when informed by a bemused saleswoman that a particular perfume is intended for men, responding gaily 'who else'. Most of all, Marianne setting out to discover what train Huber—for it is he—will be driving and when. Masquerading as a driver's wife, she steals the rota from the drivers' changing room, her antics recorded on the security monitor to the astonishment of the guards, who cannot understand what anyone would want with such an object. She pretends that her husband has been lying about his movements, but as another driver tells her, without the 'rota key' the document is worthless. Eventually she has mastered the system and tails Huber to the block of flats where he lives with his wife.

At this point, Adlon briefly departs from Marianne's point of view to show that the Huber ménage is not everything it might be. For all his good looks, Huber spends as much time in front of the tv as Marianne: his wife is bent on improving herself at night school. Indeed, we are given to understand that Mrs Huber thinks her husband a poor stick for not having progressed from train-driving long ago. Later on, Huber will explain to Marianne that he can tell how long he has been married by the number of instalments he has paid on the marriage bed.

Episode three: 'The Consummation': Marianne, dressed to kill in four-inch heels and décolleté blouse, accosts Huber on the underground platform, stuns him with her intimate knowledge of his life and works and invites him to dinner. He accepts, turns up late to find the meal burned, the clock smashed and Marianne in a state of total despair thinking he

has stood her up. Episode four: 'The Idyll': The lovers spend Huber's days off together. Now he has become her Sugarbaby as the pop song suggests. Marianne tries recipes from 'The Lovers' Cookbook', they take bubble baths, ride on Huber's motorbike, swap memories of their childhood.

Episode five: 'The Dénouement': One evening they decide to go dancing. Meanwhile Huber's wife arrives back from visiting her mother earlier than expected, finds Marianne's address on the kitchen table, rushes round in time to glimpse her husband and Marianne leave together, follows them to the rock and roll club, attacks Marianne on the dance floor and drags her husband off, leaving Marianne to resume her solitary frequentation of swimming pools and underground stations.

Among the many delights of Percy Adlon's films are his knack of choosing offbeat subjects and his sidelong view of the world. In this respect, *Sugarbaby* (Electric Pictures) is a portrait of eccentricity in the tradition of *Céleste* and *The Swing*, and though it is a 'modern subject', it particularly resembles *Céleste* not so much in showing the underside of life as in taking the detail of individual lives, however banal or absurd, with the seriousness of the individuals themselves. Who but Adlon could make the arcane complexity of drivers' rotas the linchpin of his plot or turn the rituals of laying out a corpse into riveting viewing? In this way, *Sugarbaby* and its predecessors release us from the *Dallas* treadmill, from the world in which we move from climax to climax as door-slammings exit follows deadly one-liner. *Sugarbaby* does not restore 'real time', for it is as heavily edited as any other modern film, but it restores the audience's capacity to attach drama to people and objects of normal or simple

dimensions. This is most clearly illustrated, perhaps, in the opening shot, where the viewer conventionally expects that the body in the pool will be the opening of a film noir when it is in fact merely a fat lady resting her weight.

The irony is, of course, that if this love story is attractively banal, the principal is not. Some of its appeal, even to those who are not—or not yet—overweight, lies in the fact that Marianne disproves all received wisdom about who is and is not attractive and, more important, who may and may not love and be loved. I recall a wonderful moment in the Mary McCarthy novel *The Group* where one of the male characters remarks in all seriousness that thin women are more sensual than fat women, 'because their nerve-endings are nearer the surface' (sic). Percy Adlon has made a comedy, not a film with a message, but he has nevertheless shown that fat women have hands, organs, senses, affections, passions... For a brief period Marianne stops being lonely and even the hardest heart will be moved. □

Blood heat

Betty Blue

Tom Milne

If one is to judge Jean-Jacques Beineix by *Diva*, *The Moon in the Gutter* and now *Betty Blue* (Fox), *l'amour fou* is by way of being a continuing theme. Treading very similar tightropes strung between fantasy and reality in dealing with their obsessional love affairs, the two earlier films focus on wish fulfilment. Mooning over his prima donna, the postboy of *Diva* achieves his real heart's desire by adding a crowning jewel to his collection of operatic memorabilia; while the docker pursuing his slumming beauty in *The Moon in the Gutter* is actually using her as a possible avenue of escape from his sordid circumstances. But the lovers in *Betty Blue*, adrift on a sea of existential despair and clinging to each other as lifebuoys, have no horizons but each other. They exist in a vacuum and fantasy plays a much less benign role in their reality: wishes here stand no chance at all of fulfilment.

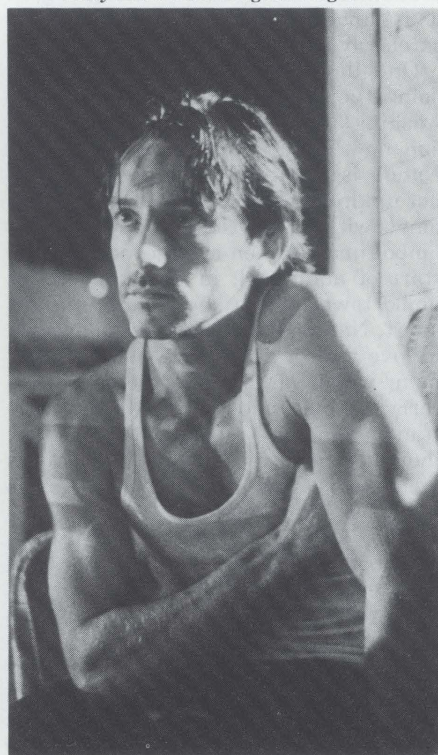
A much darker film than the other two, appropriately shot entirely on location, *Betty Blue* subscribes to a matter-of-fact actuality in marked contrast to the lyrically stylised sets of *The Moon in the Gutter* or the bizarrely supercharged vision of Paris and environs in *Diva*. Not that this is apparent right away, since the opening sequences take place on one of those quaintly poetic out-of-season beaches: a collection of unpainted wooden shacks, windswept and forlorn, huddled around a becalmed carousel on which an old man perches to serenade the emptiness with a mournful

jazz saxophone. A little like something out of a Carné-Prévert film, this landscape seems a perfect objective correlative to the couple already observed in their love-making in a long-held opening shot that is rapt but unprurient, its very intensity suggesting a similar quality, of desperation maybe, in the lovers.

He is Zorg (Jean-Hugues Anglade), thirty-fiveish, a burnt-out case in retreat from some catastrophic but unspecified disillusionment that has led him to a castaway isolation as general handyman to these beach installations (a holiday resort, perhaps, degenerating into a geriatric community). She is Betty (Béatrice Dalle), considerably younger but also disgruntled, a waitress fleeing from lecherous bosses and customers with wandering hands, utterly contented by the physical fulfilment she finds in Zorg's shack and seemingly unmindful of the pathetic remnants of a more exotic existence that still cling to Zorg (his fondness for eating chili, the Algerian bead curtain in his doorway, the Mona Lisa reproduction over his bed). Content, that is, until she simultaneously discovers that Zorg is being exploited by his employer, and that he has written a novel which he disparagingly claims he started writing simply to try to feel alive again, but which she pronounces a work of genius.

Still alive enough to illusions to fight back and still young enough to believe in the spectacular revolutionary gesture, Betty promptly hurls all Zorg's possessions out on to the beach, sets fire to the shack, and whisks him off on a hitchhiking odyssey to Paris. A marvellously funny scene, this, followed by

Betty Blue: Jean-Hugues Anglade.



an equally superb sequence in which the couple find lodgings in Paris with Betty's friend Lisa (Consuelo de Haviland) who has just acquired a new lover called Eddy (Gérard Darmon), and together the quartet embark on a bout of ecstatic fun and sexual frolic. Beautifully orchestrated, with the rapturously freewheeling quality traditionally associated with jamming the blues, these scenes not only sketch a sharp distinction between the two couples (Lisa and Eddy maintaining a relationship of proportion and balance, Zorg and Betty constantly teetering on the edge of some abyss), but contrast the passivity of Zorg with the hyperactivity of Betty (who physically assaults a publisher for describing Zorg's writing as filth, attempts to stab a woman with a fork for making insulting remarks).

Faced by the disappointment of a sheaf of publishers' rejection slips, Zorg and Betty jump at the chance to move to a small provincial town when Eddy's mother suddenly dies and he tentatively suggests that they take over management of her piano shop. It is here, amid the seemingly placid aura of neighbourhood families and children (in fact, domestic bliss is in ironically short supply), that Betty's instability, product of an enigmatic amalgam of drugs, frustration over the child she desperately wants and rage at the fate of Zorg's novel, escalates into self-destructive mania. Meanwhile Zorg, too late brought to life again under the influence of Betty's fantasy of literary genius, has been encouraged to pursue a fantasy of his own by picking out the plot of idyllic moorland on which they will build a house and live happily ever after, a dream seemingly sanctioned when a publisher at last comes up with an offer for his manuscript.

The most remarkable thing about this story of obsession, adapted from Philippe Dijan's novel *37°2 le matin* and quite superbly acted by a largely unknown cast, is that Beineix tells it in a totally unobsessive manner, constantly side-tracking into seemingly irrelevant and often disruptively funny scenes. Genuinely grieved, for instance, as he gets ready for his mother's funeral, Eddy sits with tears in his eyes while Lisa struggles to suppress her giggles as she fixes the tie he means to wear (black, certainly, but sporting a busty hand-painted nude). One of several reminders of the relativity of comedy and tragedy, 'irrelevant' details like this all relate in one way or another to the tragic fact that Zorg and Betty are out of step not only with life but with each other.

A cruel tale of love dying in an inglorious world (the only representative family in it comprises an ineffectual husband, a neglected wife, a delinquent child), the film ends with an aberrant grotesque flourish worthy of the *amour fou* it celebrates. Forbidden by the hospital authorities to visit Betty, now

catatonic, straitjacketed and drugged after putting out one of her own eyes, Zorg sneaks into the hospital in drag disguise, puts her out of his misery by smothering her with a pillow, and returns home to complete the quasi-circular history by sitting down to the exorcism of writing the story. 'Are you writing?' asks Betty's imagined voice, seemingly emanating from the white cat that has come to perch on his desk with indifferent curiosity. 'No, I'm thinking,' he replies. And the white cat, uncaring, simply stares. □

Another place

Nanou/John Pym

Getting other times and other places right, naturalistically, is a ticklish business. In her first feature, *Nanou* (Curzon), the English writer-director Conny Templeman goes to a good deal of trouble to catch the atmosphere of her principal location, Maulnes, a fictitious town near Lille: the damp ploughed fields; the cobbled monotony and rickety provincialism; the caged rabbits destined for the pot; the sense of real life happening elsewhere.

The story, we are told, is partly autobiographical. In a train, an English girl, Nanou Dawson (Imogen Stubbs), rattles across France, en route to a waitressing job at a grand hotel in Geneva. Chin on rucksack, she gazes absently at two workmen, Luc and Charles. They are having breakfast. Soon she is salting Charles' hard-boiled egg and the men are dipping their bread into her mustard jar. Before dropping from the train and crossing the field to the steel factory where he works, Luc (Jean-Philippe Ecoffey), the more forward of the two, gives Nanou a visiting card, a blue paper napkin with the name and address of his local bar. Nanou turns out to be no waitress. The train carrying her home to a photography course—the start of her real life—stops at Maulnes. She flips a coin and gets off. Neither she nor Luc quite fathoms why she stays.

Nanou is produced by Simon Perry, and like *Another Time, Another Place*, which Perry produced for Michael Radford, it is another intense, difficult cross-cultural love affair in which pace and the details at the edge of the frame or in the subtext are what really count. (Both pictures, significantly, were edited by Tom Priestley.) Conny Templeman gets off to a flying start: the dumbshow on the train and the virtually silent Geneva sequence are lightly and beautifully handled. What follows, however, despite a bustle of incident, is in a different register and is chiefly a matter of tone.

The point of view is Nanou's. The militant plotting to save a threatened steelworks in which Luc increasingly



Nanou: Daniel Day-Lewis, Imogen Stubbs.

involves himself, pulling Nanou behind him, first as coffee-maker, then as photographer and finally as assistant dynamiter, is never really explained. Which is to say, no one explains it to Nanou. One of Luc's former girlfriends appears out of the blue, there is talk of children; a slightly uneasy but unacrimonious moment between her and Nanou. From her looks, it would seem that the barmaid Chantal, a slightly older woman, carries a *tendresse* for Luc. Then there is Luc's room-mate Jacques: they begin, chastely, three in a bed, before Luc, at Nanou's instigation (in a scene of charged and unexpected eroticism), wins the day. Jacques disappears—lovesick, a political mission, illness, drink?—the first and the last, probably, though again it is unclear, but not annoyingly or carelessly so.

One day Chantal comes on Nanou doing the laundry at the town's public washing place. She is incredulous, no one now washes in the open air—but Nanou is a stranger, it's permitted. In not unkind amusement, Chantal lends a hand with the wringing out. In this limbo time between adolescence and the start of adulthood, in this nondescript limbo town, where she is welcome but apart, Nanou finds herself falling slowly in love with a mercurial, violent young man, whom in the end, though she is carrying his child, she cannot understand and is compelled to leave, though without real regrets. The place is accurately caught; the time, however, is somehow out of time.

Imogen Stubbs, in her first film part, with her mane of blonde hair, her bold dark eyebrows and her strong, formed yet unformed features, plays Nanou as a capable young woman who, despite moments of dreamy vacancy, takes her photography seriously, is more than halfway to knowing herself and is determined to try, at least, to domesticate

Luc. 'You can be cosy and poor,' she observes. Their rooms, she believes, would benefit from curtains. Her strength of character and the manner in which she stands up to Luc are worth attention. Jean-Philippe Ecoffey (seen most recently in Britain as the lovesick metal-worker in Claude Miller's *L'Effrontée*) plays Luc with a tucked-up, faintly surly presence. He puts up the curtains himself, eventually, and even buys Nanou a second-hand leather armchair. But in his view Nanou's first reaction to the armchair is wrong, and he storms out in a huff. They grate on each other. Luc is happier filching cameras and photography books, gifts that because he has not paid for them do not seem his responsibility.

The film has its moments of uncertainty; the underlining is once or twice too heavy. The pregnant Nanou seeks advice from a kindly village mother with a houseful of children; in her young days, the woman says, there was no choice, she had her first child when she was her daughter Brigitte's age; and there on cue in the doorway behind is Brigitte adjusting her wedding dress. On the whole, however, the film is admirably fleshed out with a roster of finely shaded secondary characters: the shy moonfaced Charles (Christophe Lidon); Nanou's parents (Anna Cropper and Patrick O'Connell), who do their best to approve of their daughter's ménage, but are, it is hinted, a shade too bound up in themselves really to worry about her (it will take them all their Italian holiday to recover from this, Nanou accurately comments); and Max (Daniel Day-Lewis), Nanou's English boyfriend, who appears fleetingly and whose assurance and overbred politeness give him just enough superciliousness to prevent him revealing his true feelings about Luc. Conny Templeman launches herself with an attractively modest confidence. □

BOOK REVIEWS

Buy British

ALL OUR YESTERDAYS
90 Years of British Cinema
edited by Charles Barr
BFI/£12.95

With customary acuity, Lindsay Anderson used to say that reviewing British cinema was the critic's equivalent of National Service. They have long since abolished National Service; they have very nearly abolished the British film industry; perhaps the only thing left for the critic to bite the bullet over is a book about the British film industry.

The editor, Charles Barr, kicks off *All Our Yesterdays* with an essay entitled 'Amnesia and Schizophrenia', in which he attempts a spirited rescue operation to salvage British cinema from the swamp in which it is generally reckoned by critics to have sunk. Indeed, the opening words are Satyajit Ray's famous comment that the British are temperamentally not equipped to make the best use of a movie camera. Barr goes on to point out, however, that it is the British themselves who are their own most trenchant critics, citing magazines which he reckons to have been on the 'leading edge' of film criticism. That he ends the list with *Screen* (1971) is a pity, for semiology was a dark and unproductive cul-de-sac, from which most sane men have now emerged into the sunlight, leaving only a few lost souls still blundering around under its influence. Barr goes on to point up the extraordinary pendulum swing of Michael Powell's critical reputation, and places his work firmly at the centre of that strain in British cinema which might loosely be called anti-realistic. It is this strain which Harold Wilson decried in his speech to the House of Commons in 1948, when he expressed the desire for more films about 'our way of life', a way of life which did not include 'amnesia and schizophrenia' as stock parts—hence the title of Barr's essay.

Having sketched the map's boundaries, the following 22 essays attempt to fill in the terrain. The high ground of the book consists of five essays which explore the connection of cinema to other media. Brian McFarlane surveys literary sources, and Andy Medhurst traces the links between music hall and cinema. Geoff Brown, surveying the relation of the theatre to film, comes to the conclusion that the stage's grip is a deadly one. It is worth citing briefly his closing note, in which he points out that a new and fashionable director like Richard Eyre can be said to have

'roots' in theatre, roots in TV, even roots in video, but the only place his roots are not in is cinema. There are finally two essays, from John Caughie and Charles Barr again, on broadcasting and cinema, Caughie attempting to place their separate developments within the same cultural context, and Barr looking more closely at their rivalry. He concludes that cinema's relation to television has moved on from fascination and fear, through scorn, then envy, to a complex co-operation, 'whose results it is, in 1986, rather too early to predict.' Predict, however, is precisely what he should have done. The essay shows that he has the credentials; a little risk-taking would have been instructive and entertaining.

Surrounding this high ground is a broad plateau, consisting of three main areas. Those essays which deal with the film industry and its relations with the state. Those which look at the two main 'modes or conceptions' of British cinema, the realist and the non-realist. And a round-up of 'divergent strands' such as animation, 'independent' and 'regional' cinema. In the first category Julian Petley contributes 'Cinema and State', which concentrates on economic aid and censorship; and Robert Murphy, in 'Under the Shadow of Hollywood', comes to the conclusion that we will never shake off the Hollywood influence until the government provides a framework and a climate in which film production can flourish. In the second category Julian Petley explores thoroughly the two divergent strains of British cinema. He does seem to think, however, that there is still in most criticism a preference for a 'dominant realistic aesthetic'. This comes as a surprise to this reviewer, who happens to be the film editor of a magazine, *Time Out*, which for some 15 years has been championing the cause of Michael Powell and 'anti-realistic' cinema. Moreover, there are many references to what Petley calls the 'native writing machine', which I assume to be a derogatory reference to some imagined critical consensus somewhere 'out there'. But critical work on the cinema in Britain is of such diversity (as this book happens to demonstrate) that it is virtually impossible to find any common ground between critics. And I have been searching for years to find a machine which would write for me, but to no avail.

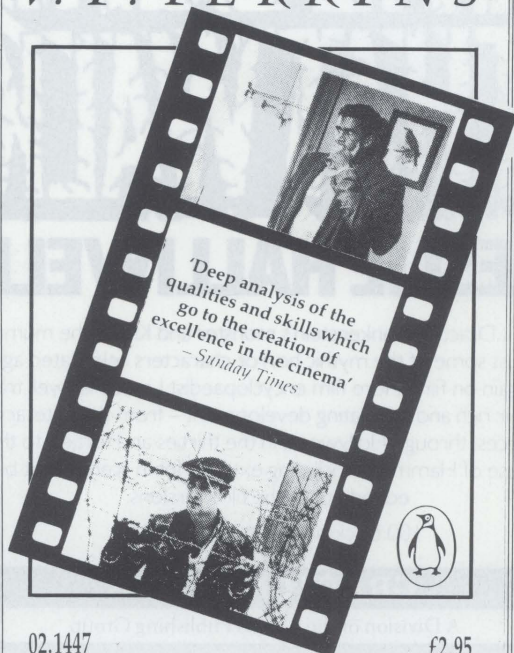
Finally, completing the map, though not entirely filling in the boundaries delineated in the opening essay, comes a loose hold-all of shorter case studies. There is Jeffrey Richards on Paul Robeson, 'The Black Man as Film

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BOOK REVIEWS

Hero', which tends to echo with the distinctive sound of special pleading. To characterise Robeson as a political actor who struggled to obtain racial equality is fair enough, but to include such films as *King Solomon's Mines* as part of that struggle is coming it a bit. There is Christine Geraghty on the career of Diana Dors, who seems to think that Alan Brien describing Dors as possessing a 'Hogarthian earthiness' is expressing hostility.

There is a reassessment of Dirk Bogarde's career by Andy Medhurst, which takes the only possible route open to anyone wishing to challenge critical orthodoxy on this actor: that his early work for British cinema was superior to his later work as an international star. It is good to find such films as *Victim* and *The Singer Not the Song* being championed, but the idea that these constitute genuine subversion in popular culture, as opposed to the 'elitist' excursions into 'minority art', is a tenuous one. And there is a very good critical piece on *The Ship That Died of Shame* from Jim Cook, exactly the kind of thoughtful reassessment which validates the enterprise of criticism, and more of which could have profitably been included in this book.

To attempt any final summation on so diverse a book would seem impossible. Indeed Charles Barr rather charmingly pre-empted any possibility in his introduction, when he admits that the book is the result of personal enthusiasms rather than an overall design. If there is one underlying aesthetic to be found running through the essays as a common assumption, it is the preference for the 'anti-realistic' strain of British cinema, against the 'realism' of, say, the New Cinema. (I dislike using these terms; they are slippery, in a way which the book does not altogether acknowledge.) Where, then, is there any appreciation of Britain's two current leading film-makers, Nicolas Roeg and John Boorman, both of whom adhere to an aesthetic which is not remotely realistic? It is a bad omission.

Finally, it is hard to picture exactly who this book is written for. Certainly not the general reader, nor the punter in the stalls with perhaps a more than usual liking for British films. Many of the essays are written by practising academics, and many adopt a scholarly approach. Moreover, there are many instances of the sort of word usage which seems to emanate solely from universities these days. The term 'valorise' for example; or the horrible use of 'privilege' as a verb. It would be a pity if the book was relegated to gathering dust on the shelves of campus

libraries, for there is much of use and instruction for people with a more general interest in film than is found on specialist courses. A nod in their direction might well have been the inclusion of some pieces by people actually working within the industry; another noticeable omission. But, as one British film director to whom I showed it said, with a despairing shrug, 'The British film industry gets the books it deserves.'

CHRIS PEACHMENT

Whodunit?

A CAST OF KILLERS

by Sidney Kirkpatrick
Hutchinson/£10.95

In February 1922, only months after the Fatty Arbuckle scandal had left Hollywood tottering, new seismic disturbances attended the murder of a distinguished and successful film-maker, William Desmond Taylor. Even more sensational than the Arbuckle affair, with headlines flying about caches of love letters, monogrammed undies, pornographic pictures and drugs—rumours that effectively ruined the careers of Mabel Normand and Mary Miles Minter—the murder loomed even larger as a mystery, not least with the discovery that William Desmond Taylor had fled another life (and family) as William Deane Tanner before settling in Hollywood. Despite a barrage of evidence and a host of suspects, no one was ever indicted for the crime.

Late in 1966, left out in the cold by the new youth-oriented Hollywood but convinced he still had something to contribute at the age of 71, King Vidor desperately needed a saleable script. Fascinated by the Taylor story, having been around himself at the time and having later done some desultory research on the case, Vidor felt that this was it, provided he could come up with a solution to the mystery. He accordingly embarked on a Lew Archer investigation that covered the next six months, incorporating interviews with a starry cast of contemporary on-lookers and investigators (among them Gloria Swanson, Allan Dwan, Laurence Stallings, Arbuckle's widow Minta Durfee, Antonio Moreno, and Mary Miles Minter herself), and rounding out into a classic hardboiled thriller in which—as in the best of Ross Macdonald—the past looms monstrously up to engulf the present. He also, almost incidentally, nailed the killer.

Vidor's dossier, found hidden away by Sidney Kirkpatrick

BOOK REVIEWS

while researching an authorised biography after the film-maker's death in 1982, forms the substance of this book. Kirkpatrick, alas, is not quite the stylist Ross Macdonald was, and one's heart sinks as Vidor makes his entry: 'In dark sunglasses and his favourite brown-checked cap, he drove his supercharged red Thunderbird down Sunset Boulevard and out of Beverly Hills...' There are also some faintly embarrassing annotations on Vidor's troubled realisation that he was growing old, and relating to a languishing romance with Colleen Moore (who was set to produce his Taylor film) of over forty years standing since he had directed her in *The Sky Pilot* in 1921. But these do ultimately pay dividends as part of a complex emotional context in which, having completed his story, Vidor decided to do nothing with it, at least for the time being. Did he really, in a time when everything seemed to be changing for the worse, want to rake up and sully happier days by displaying their dark side?

For it was a dark tale that Vidor had to tell, and to do him credit, Kirkpatrick organises it as skilfully as any of the great thriller-writers. The least of its puzzles, as Vidor notes, was who actually killed Taylor (in deference to the whodunit aspect, I won't name the guilty party; but the final confrontation, following the discovery of circumstantial corroboration in the unsolved 1937 murder of another Hollywood film-maker, Emmett J. Flynn, makes for a truly chilling scene).

What gradually emerges is a history of corruption in which not only was the 1922 Los Angeles district attorney on the take from the killer, busily destroying evidence and heading off members of staff who started getting warm, but his two immediate successors inherited the graft, carefully closing off investigations whenever the case threatened to reopen (by internal combustion now) and blow sky high. Paralleling this, explaining the scandalous revelations in the papers and making the D.A.'s task all the easier, was Paramount's busy attempt at a cover-up. Ironically this was initiated because, believing Taylor to have died of natural causes, knowing him to be a pervert with a penchant for small boys and not wanting the name of one of their top-grossing directors to be dragged through the mud, the studio planted evidence and news stories pointing to spicy but heterosexual scandals. Poor, relatively innocent Mabel Normand and Mary Miles Minter were destroyed as a result? Sure, but they were expendable, their contracts an embarrassment to the studio, since box-office returns indicated

that both stars were already over the hill.

High-handed Hollywood cover-ups are nothing new, but rarely can the nature of the beast have been so chillingly exposed. What we have here, in effect, is a graphic portrayal of a rule of terror neatly encapsulated by actress Claire Windsor. Asked why no one spoke up about the flagrant distortions of the truth, she told Vidor: 'We were all laboratory specimens, everyone in Hollywood was under such close microscopic scrutiny all the time that if we wanted to keep any secrets at all, we'd better just toe the line and keep our mouths shut. I started to defend Mabel—she was my friend—but the second I opened my mouth, my picture was splattered across the *Herald-Examiner* along with my given name and the fact that I had a three-year-old illegitimate son, which, never mind the circumstances surrounding it, was just the kind of scandalous information the papers loved printing about us. If I hadn't shut up, I would have been out of a job.'

Not a pretty story, but a fascinating one. And for buffs tired of spotting Hitchcock personal appearances or black cats in Mamoulian films, the book proposes a new pastime. It seems that, forced to part by circumstances, Vidor and Colleen Moore kept in romantic touch without ever seeing each other. 'For forty years, each continued sending the other messages in their lovers' code, always hidden in an innocent motion picture scene. Moore would tell each leading man that "love never dies", and Vidor would decorate his sets with violets, which he had always given Moore during their short time together.'

TOM MILNE

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

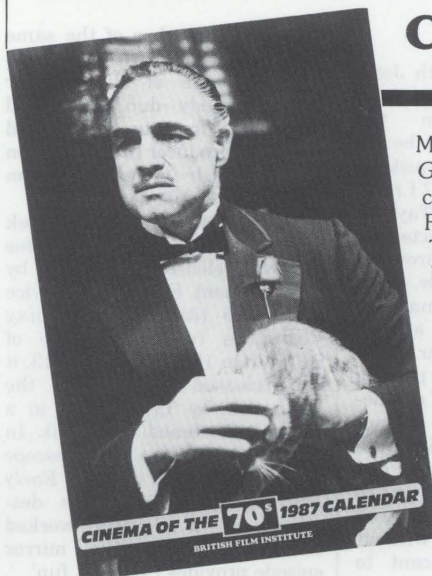
RICHARD ALWYN has been preparing a thesis on the films of Jean Grémillon... JOHN HOPEWELL's book for BFI Publishing, *Out of the Past: Spanish Cinema after Franco*, is due out this month...

JOHN HOWKINS is Executive Director of the International Institute of Communications...

PHILIP KEMP is a freelance scriptwriter and film historian, currently working on a study of Alexander Mackendrick's films...

JOSEF SKVORECKY wrote scripts for Menzel (*Crime in the Night Club*, *Crime in the Girls School*) and Schorm (*End of a Priest*). His novels, including *Miss Silver's Past* and *The Engineer of Human Souls*, have been published in Britain and he now teaches in Massachusetts... WILLIAM URICCHIO is assistant professor in the school of communications, Pennsylvania State University.

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The Academy

SIR,—I was delighted with John Russell Taylor's witty and well-informed obituary on the Academy Cinema. Will it be regarded as ungracious nit-picking if I make one small moan? I refer to the sentence in Russell Taylor's article where he characterises the Academy as 'middle-brow'.

From one point of view, he is right, of course. No cinema open to the public, seven days a week and fifty-two weeks a year, could possibly manage without playing a considerable number of middle-brow films. There simply are not enough new films of first-rate artistic quality about in any one year. By middle-brow I mean films that are well written, well acted and well directed, without adding anything significant to the scope of film as an art ('It does not contribute to the grammar of film,' George Hoellering used to say). *Aspern* was certainly a film of this kind, but I would not regard it as a 'perfect' Academy film. Although well made, intelligent and enjoyable, it was the kind of film we played when nothing better was available.

The films we hope to be remembered by are some of the finest works of, say, Eisenstein, Dreyer and Vigo; Renoir, Carné, Duvivier, Feyder, Buñuel, Godard and Rohmer; Rossellini, Fellini, Antonioni and Olmi; Kurosawa, Ozu, Mizoguchi and Kobayashi; Bergman, Jancsó and Bill Douglas. Many of these were shown at the Academy long before their directors became household names, and few of them could, I think, be labelled middle-brow.

Yours faithfully,
IVO JAROSY
Academy Cinema
London

Broken Mirrors

SIR,—Herewith a belated reaction to David Robinson's excellent article 'The Italian Comedy' (SIGHT AND SOUND, Spring 1986).

The Italian film *Kri Kri Domestico* (1913) may have been 'the most sophisticated cinema representation of the broken mirror gag which originated in the 19th-century music halls, and was used in turn by Chaplin, Linder and the Marx Brothers,' but it was not 'the first'. There was at least one earlier version, a Dutch film called *De Gebroken Spiegel* (*The Broken Mirror*). This film, featuring Johannes Philip Kelly as the servant and Dirk Lageman as his befuddled master, was premiered in Amsterdam on 30 March 1912.

The broken mirror sketch had first been presented in Holland in 1911, when its German authors, the Schwarz Brothers, were touring continental variety

halls. In November of the same year the sketch was added to the repertoire of the popular Dutch comedy duo Kelly and Lageman. Their success inspired the film producer Franz Anton Nöggerath Jr to make a film version of the playlet.

On 5 April 1912, just a week after its Dutch premiere, this film was released in England by the Gaumont Film Hire Service under the title *Early Morning Reflections* (with a footage of 930 ft). On 18 September 1913, it was released again under the same title by Tyler Films in a version shortened to 890 ft. In the supplement to the *Bioscope* of 4 September 1913, *Early Morning Reflections* was described as 'a cleverly worked comic, in which the mirror episode provides excellent fun'.

Unfortunately, no prints of *De Gebroken Spiegel* are known to exist, so that it is now impossible to compare it with any of the surviving film versions of the broken mirror gag as performed by Kri Kri, Max Linder, et al.

Yours faithfully,
GEOFF DONALDSON
Rotterdam
Holland

Orson Welles

SIR,—Jonathan Rosenbaum's wonderfully revealing article on Orson Welles' finished and half-finished projects that may, one hopes, be released some day reminded me of one tantalising item that was released but seems to have got lost. I refer to a trailer for *Citizen Kane* which was as startling as the film itself and which is never referred to in any of the books and articles on the film. Nor have I ever met anyone who saw it, but I do know that a typical publicity department type of trailer was obviously preferred by RKO.

I worked for a short time as a projectionist in 1941 and therefore have a fairly accurate memory of some of it: Welles' voice calling for 'lights' and the beam from the skylight appears, then 'sound' and the mike boom swings into the beam, then 'action' signals a frantic series of images—none from the film itself—all backstage spoofing by the actors as each one is introduced with a jokey piece of action. Such was the pace of the sequence that I can now only recall in any detail the actor Erskine Sandford, leaning, I think, on a model of Xanadu, and a shot of Everett Sloane madly running from a great distance, apparently towards the camera but in reality towards a reflection of himself in one of the two great mirrors on the Xanadu set. Orson Welles did not appear, of course, and it ended with the customary 'my

name is Orson Welles'.

I find it extremely odd that it has never been seen again (by me, anyway) or that there is never any mention of it. Does it still exist? Does anyone remember it? I am sure it is worth reviving—if only to see the studio interiors, the bits of sets and models, the actors as themselves, and the wonderful atmosphere of those working professionals fooling about in the gaps between takes—all, of course, beautifully lit and photographed and, I suspect, directed.

Yours faithfully,
BARRY WILKINSON
Brighton

SIR,—If you seek the great white whale, you will not find him in the whaling grounds but more likely in the vaults of HM Customs and Excise.

Seriously, reading Jonathan Rosenbaum's article on Orson Welles I delved deep into the fading memories of Associated Rediffusion TV. I was a film editor and director from 1955 and remember the *Moby Dick* production. The whale was in the stalls and the ship on stage. Orson insisted on shooting all his

close-ups for the entire production in one go with the camera canted to simulate the ship rolling about. As a result, nobody believed it would ever cut together. It would have been shot in 35mm B&W, possibly by ARTV's senior film cameraman Ted Lloyd.

I remember a large number of cans turning up at the old Television House in Kingsway in the late 60s, in bond, with a customs demand for duty. Rediffusion in the dying days of its contract would not, of course, pay so they would have been returned to bond. Which is where they may be to this day.

I cannot remember what ARTV's involvement in the production was, except that Orson was shooting some programmes for ARTV in the early days—'Orson Welles in London', or similar. They would have been edited by the late Bill Morton, who was one of the original film editors with AR and who had worked with Orson in Spain—another blind alley I fear.

So this may be of no value whatever, but someone might like to follow it up.

Yours faithfully,
JIM POPLÉ
Thames Television

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

ARTIFICIAL EYE for *The Legend of the Suram Fortress*, *The Sacrifice*.

CANNON for photograph of Menahem Golan and Yoram Globus.

COLUMBIA-CANNON-WARNER for *The Mission*, *Cobra*, *Invaders from Mars*, *Lemon Popsicle*, *Maria's Lovers*, *Lepke*.

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CASTAWAY FILMS for *Castaway*.

UMBRELLA FILMS for *Nanou*.

ZENITH PRODUCTIONS for *Inspector Morse*.

BARRANDOV STUDIO, PRAGUE for *The Joke*, *Seclusion Near a Forest*, *Crime in the Night Club*.

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photographs of Max Ophüls and Joan Fontaine, Preston Sturges, Michael Powell.

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MICHAEL MOORCOCK

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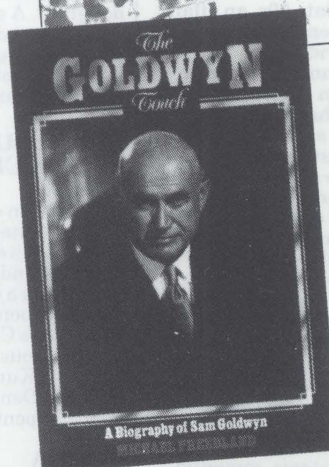
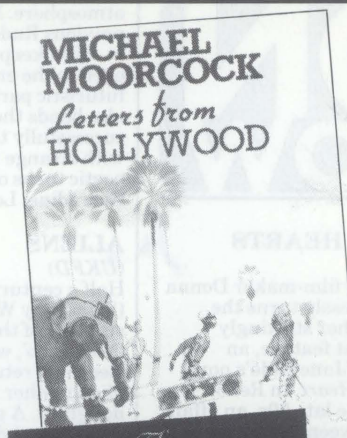
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ON NOW

●DESERT HEARTS

(Mainline)

Documentary film-maker Donna Deitch effortlessly turns the heart over in her strikingly handsome first feature, an adaptation of Jane Rule's novel *Desert of the Heart*. In Reno, Nevada, in the late 50s, an affair blossoms between the young artist Cay (Patricia Charbonneau) and the older academic Vivian (Helen Shaver); the latter, who has come from New York for a swift, tidy divorce, is at first knocked sideways by the strength, confusion and novelty of her feelings. Period costume, decor and music are used with exceptional skill to conjure an atmosphere of longing, frustration and desire. The film deftly explores tensions in the traditional family (Audra Lindley gives a powerhouse performance as Cay's bitter, possessive stepmother) and in heterosexual relationships: life, it suggests, is full of positive alternatives, platonic, romantic and sexual. (Andra Akers, Dean Butler.)

●OSSESSIONE

(BFI)

It was Renoir who suggested to Visconti the idea of adapting James Cain's thriller *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, so it's appropriate that it is London's Renoir cinema that has now given *Osessione* its British premiere—some forty years later. Visconti's version simplifies the plot and transfers the action to realistic settings in the Po Valley. Banned by the Fascist censorship on its completion in 1942, *Osessione* blazed the trail for neo-realism. Unlike many neo-realist classics it does not seem to have dated and remains as intensely compelling as ever. (Clara Calamai, Massimo Girotti, Juan De Landa.)

●TROUBLE IN MIND

(Recorded Releasing)

Like *Remember My Name*, Alan Rudolph's new film is about an ex-convict who returns home with disruptive effect on all concerned. Unlike that film, which gained much from its small-town, Southern California settings, *Trouble in Mind* is a projection into some inhospitable future state (of the mind, quite possibly). Kris Kristofferson, with the rigors of *Heaven's Gate* still seeming to hang about his weatherbeaten features topped by a broad black hat, returns to Rain City (actually Seattle) where militia patrol the streets, gangsters squabble over baubles, and the only safe haven is Wanda's Café. Wanda is played by Genevieve Bujold as a warmhearted albeit toughminded variation on her role in *Choose Me*, and problems and puzzles of the heart soon

begin breaking up the chilly atmosphere. More than any previous Rudolph film, *Trouble in Mind* keeps its genre options open to the end (gangster film, futuristic parable, Western), but also bends them more successfully than ever before with strange pixillations and poetic turns of image. (Keith Carradine, Lori Singer.)

ALIENS

(UKFD)

Half a century later, Ripley (Sigourney Weaver), lone survivor of the starship 'Nostromo', wakes from hyper-sleep and returns to battle an alien mother for an orphaned daughter. A grimy marine detachment don't know what they are up against: a well-oiled fantasy, admirably designed. (Director, James Cameron.)

BIG TROUBLE IN LITTLE CHINA

(UKFD)

Misbegotten cross between an Indiana Jones adventure and a martial arts epic, with a musclebound trucker saving the world from a demonic tong war rumbling beneath San Francisco's Chinatown. Glitzy sets, vacuous characters, limping fantasy. (Kurt Russell, Kim Cattrall, Dennis Dun; director, John Carpenter.)

COBRA

(Columbia-Cannon-Warner)

Sylvester Stallone works for the Zombie Squad, a police unit which specialises in trapping psychopaths. This tacky ripoff of almost everything—*Dirty Harry*, *Assault on Precinct 13*, *Streets of Fire*—comes off as a slightly more expensive version of the 1980 vintage skid row slash exploitationer. (Brigitte Nielson, Andrew Robinson; director, George Pan Cosmatos.)

CRITTERS

(Palace)

Toothy tumbleweeds from outer space terrorise a rural American homestead until a pair of alien bounty hunters turn up to take them in. A pleasant, unexceptional slice of 50s-style s-f with cheerful monsters and an appropriately stereotyped selection of human beings. (Dee Wallace Stone, M. Emmet Walsh; director, Stephen Herek.)

CROSSROADS

(Columbia-Cannon-Warner)

Or *The Trip to Bountiful* meets *All That Money Can Buy*. Blues-crazy teenager Ralph Macchio tries to help old-time harmonica player Joe Seneca get back to the Mississippi Delta; Macchio wants to learn a legendary lost song, and Seneca wants to renege on his deal with the Devil. Pleasant, with a good Ry Cooder score, but it dawdles a bit on its road to a stirring finale. (Director, Walter Hill.)

DAY OF THE DEAD

(Entertainment)

The third of George A. Romero's 'Living Dead' films finds flesh-eating zombies outnumbering the living by 400,000 to one. In a deep-level survival shelter, a mad scientist tries to domesticate the dead with Beethoven and raw meat, while his colleagues fall

under the sway of a gun-happy militarist. A return to form for the director and the genre after the lazy self-parody of movies like *Creepshow*. (Lori Cardille, Terry Alexander.)

DUST

(ICA)

Brave but ultimately doomed attempt to film J. M. Coetzee's novel *In the Heart of the Country*, about the murderous fantasies of a farmer's daughter on the South African veldt. Essentially an interior monologue, and Jane Birkin's persuasive rendering of a mind on the edge of madness is unavoidably diminished by the intrusion of an exterior perspective. (Trevor Howard, John Matshikiza; director, Marion Hänsel.)

A FINE MESS

(Columbia-Cannon-Warner)

Rather shapeless and overdriven farce from Blake Edwards, concerning the antics of a womanising actor (Ted Danson), his rollerskating-waiter friend (Howie Mandel), some bumbling gangsters and an overdriven racehorse. The plot needn't be the thing, but then the gags and set-pieces aren't much either. (Richard Mulligan, Stuart Margolin, Paul Sorvino.)

THE FRINGE DWELLERS

(Virgin)

This story of an Aborigine family at the sharp end of social disadvantage is sober and well meaning; a lack of documentary precision or dramatic momentum, however, fails to stave off monotony and unintentional patronising overtones. (Kristina Nehm, Justine Saunders, Bob Maza; director, Bruce Beresford.)

THE GREAT MOUSE DETECTIVE

(UKFD)

A version of Sherlock Holmes scaled down to mouse size, with a nice voice characterisation by Vincent Price as the villain (a rat who would be thought a mouse) and generally plain but dynamic animation. The few songs, however, contribute less to the mood than the frequent and over-emphasised violence.

HIGHLANDER

(Columbia-Cannon-Warner)

Engagingly over-the-top mixture of urban thriller, swashbuckler and black comedy, wherein a dwindling band of immortals duel down the centuries until the final showdown in present-day New York. Christopher Lambert wears his approximately 300 years with world-weary aplomb; Russell Mulcahy directs with a superabundance of visual energy. (Sean Connery.)

INVADERS FROM MARS

(Columbia-Cannon-Warner)

Quite expensive looking, and dynamically handled for most of the way, this remake of the 1953 s-f fantasy by William Cameron Menzies has a lively sense of the ridiculous despite being weakened by its anachronistic premise and the juvenile repulsiveness of the invaders themselves. (Karen Black, Hunter Carson, Timothy Bottoms; director, Tobe Hooper.)

PIRATES

(Columbia-Cannon-Warner)

Opening and closing with sea-dog Walter Matthau and his sidekick Cris Campion adrift on an open raft, this is at heart a two-hour version of one of Roman Polanski's early shorts about Laurel and Hardy pairs engaged in absurdist missions. The genre spoofing is less acute than in *Dance of the Vampires*, but the ships and swordplay are deployed with some swashbuckling style.

PRETTY IN PINK

(UIP)

A filmed version of the story usually told in the 'photo-love' features of teenage girls' magazines. Poor but stylish Molly Ringwald and rich but human Andrew McCarthy fall in love despite their differing backgrounds. Producer/screenwriter John Hughes embroiders the slight story with colourful teen dialogue and Jon Cryer, Annie Potts and Harry Dean Stanton turn in endearing supporting performances. (Director, Howard Deutch.)

PSYCHO III

(UIP)

Starts as *Vertigo* with a novice nun trying to jump off a belltower. Slips back into the groove as (her initials and appearance conjuring Marion Crane) she flees to the Bates Motel, where Mother II is now stuffed and persuading an unhappy Norman to wield his knife. Wild but quite fun. (Anthony Perkins, Diana Scarwid, Jeff Fahey; director, Anthony Perkins.)

RENDEZ-VOUS

(Cannon)

Turgidly arty meditation on love and desire, using *Romeo and Juliet* as a touchstone, with a provincial lassie coming to Paris to pursue life (i.e., sex) and a career on the stage, but discovering an abyss. Ravid with intellectual pretensions. (Juliette Binoche, Lambert Wilson, Jean-Louis Trintignant; director, André Téchiné.)

ROSA LUXEMBURG

(Artificial Eye)

Margarethe von Trotta's sympathy for her subject leads her somewhat off the path of history. But Barbara Sukowa's charismatic renditions of Rosa's greatest speeches lift a rather downbeat film and bring home some political lessons. (Daniel Olbrychski.)

TWICE IN A LIFETIME

(Miracle)

Colin Welland's story of a steel foundry worker who deserts wife and family for another woman was originally written with Manchester in mind. The transposition to America has been made smoothly enough, but the male friendships still have a North of England feeling, and seem more the dramatic crux of the film than Gene Hackman's conventionally blossoming romance with Ann-Margret. (Ellen Burstyn, Amy Madigan; director, Bud Yorkin.)

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Mark Frith's **THE FALL OF BILLIE KORTY**, '— an unusual and imaginative fantasy'. Kenny Mathieson, *The Times Educational Supplement*.

Gillies MacKinnon's **PASSING GLORY** (winner of the 'Best Newcomer Award', Celtic Film Festival and winner of the First Scottish Film Prize), '— full of humour and humanity'. Derek Malcolm of *The Guardian*.

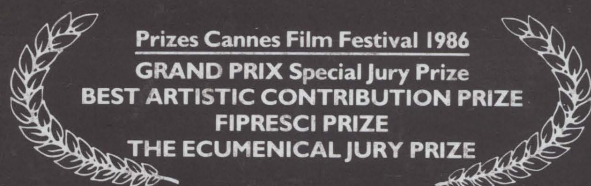
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I felt encouraged and stimulated: someone was expressing what I had always wanted to say without knowing how.

Tarkovsky is for me the greatest, the one who invented a new language, true to the nature of film, as it captures life as a reflection, life as a dream.

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